

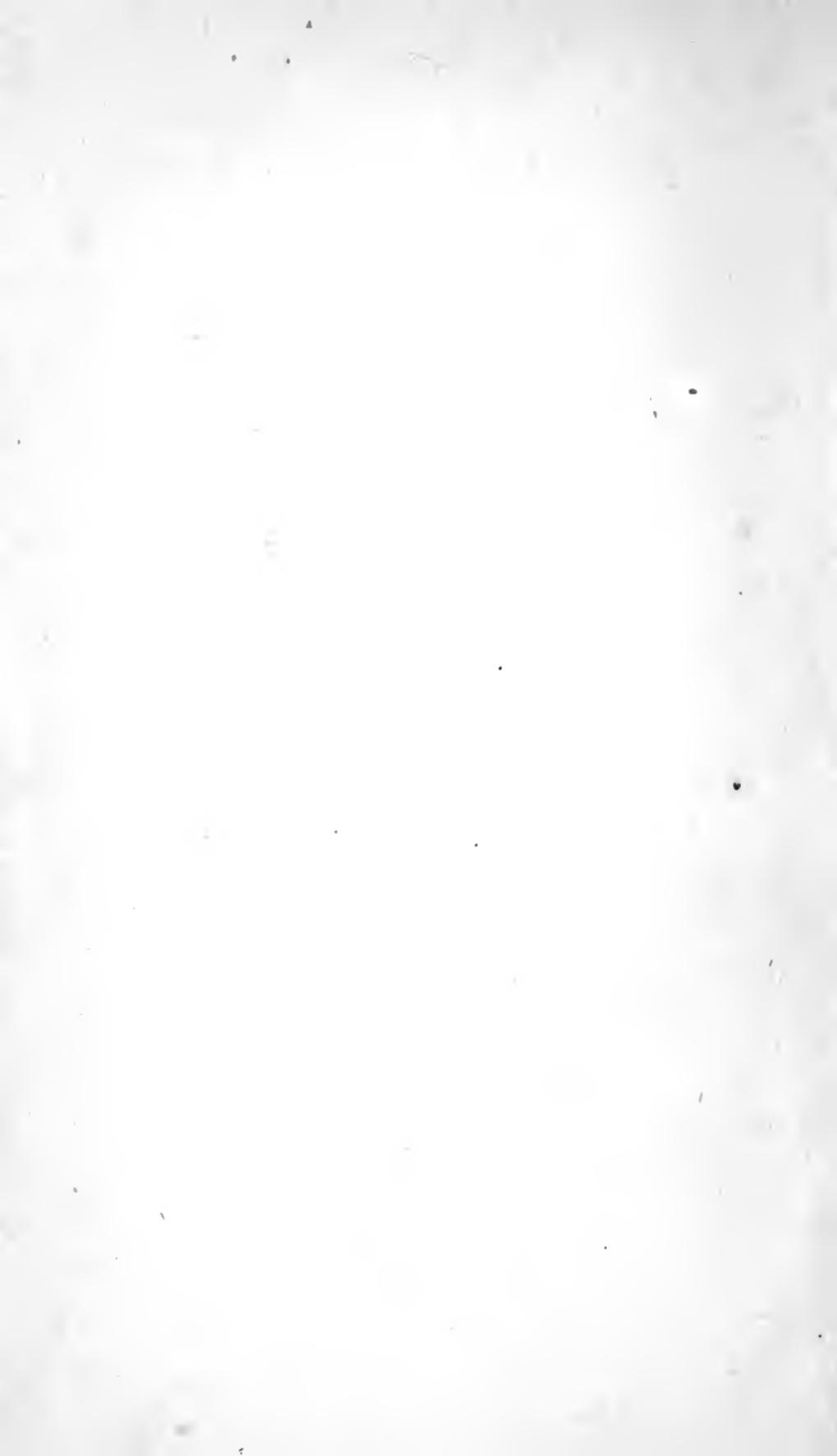


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GERALD'S ORDEAL.

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GERALD'S ORDEAL.

1866.

A NOVEL,

BY

RHAYNEL MURRAY.

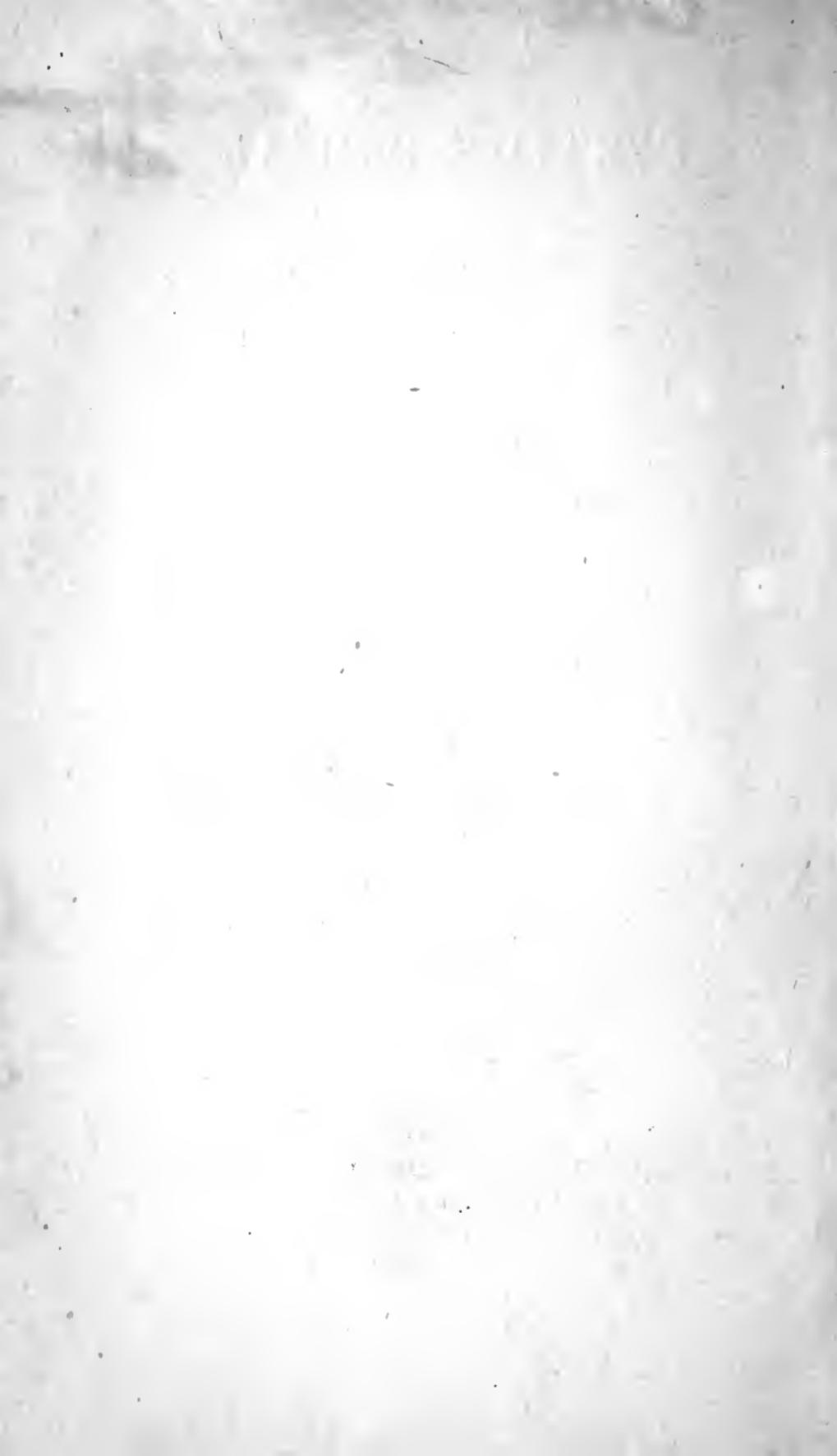
Magna est veritas—et prævalebit.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

Many persons object, upon principle, to what they term, "Religious Novels," deeming (and with reason as a general rule) so grave a subject as that of religion, out of place in a work of fiction, and preferring (at least, so they say) to read serious books when they are in a serious mood.

But these persons forget, that there are many who never open a serious book at all, and yet, when serious subjects are brought forward in a work of light reading, they peruse such pas-

sages with interest and pleasure. Can we not imagine such an one thinking, “If what this book says be true, I must look deeper into it.” And thus real and lasting good may be effected, when otherwise there would have been no chance, humanly speaking, of bringing such subjects before their notice.

If my book induces any such thoughts, I shall be more than satisfied.

R. M.

April, 1872.

GERALD'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE Drawing-room of Wentmore Rectory was lighted by three windows, opening on to a rose-covered verandah, beyond which stretched a lawn and flower-garden.

Some morning visitors had called, and Lady Frances Lennox, the Rector's wife, was listening to a long account of the Archery meeting which had just taken place in the neighbourhood, and about which her neighbour, Mrs. Fraser Smith, had a great deal to say.

They were the sole occupants of the room ; the younger members of the party having strolled into the garden, and the conversation of the two ladies was now and again broken in upon, by the cheerful voices which sounded through the open window. An involuntary smile played upon the mother's face, as she distinguished her darling Blanche's tones above the others. The sound of

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that voice was ever as music in her ears, and her laugh (there is so much difference in laughs) she could not mistake.

It was so full of merriment, one smiled from very sympathy on hearing it.

“Sa voix argentine,
Echo limpide et pur de son âme enfantine,
Musique de cette âme où tout semblait chanter
Egayait jusqu'à l'air qui l'entendait monter !”

“We stayed late as we always do,” Mrs. Smith was saying. “My dear girls are always engaged for every dance before the evening begins. I am a capital *chaperone* as you know, and never hurry them away till they are ready to go. I don't think it is fair. We were young once ourselves, dear Lady Frances, and ought to make allowances. Don't you think so?”

“Oh, certainly,” answered Lady Frances, “and your girls dance so well, I do not wonder at their being sought after!”

“But I assure you,” and Mrs. Smith's voice sank into a low confidential tone, “it is not every one I allow them to dance with. Mr. Fraser-Smith is so very particular, and one is obliged to draw the line somewhere. I am afraid I often give offence, because I will *not* ask people to our house, with whom I do not wish them to be intimate. One must be so careful you know.”

Now as Lady Frances perfectly well knew, that

Mrs. Smith's goodnature made her scatter invitations very plentifully in all directions, when an entertainment was to be given at "The Oaks," and that no one was ever refused a card who asked for one; this assurance rather amused her than otherwise, but she did not allow Mrs. Smith to perceive that such was the case.

"People are so absurd," continued that lady, earnestly. "Mrs. Gregory and Lady Attleborough both came up to me last night, to ask if they were to congratulate me on Minnie's engagement to Captain Lucas. Why, the poor child had only met him once before, and they say he hasn't a sixpence, so it is so very ridiculous."

"I do think it very ill-natured," said Lady Frances, "of anyone to insinuate, because two people are seen dancing together, or speaking to one another a little oftener than usual, that therefore there must be something between them. But perhaps Captain Lucas was rather marked in his attentions to your Minnie, and if so—"

"Oh! but dear Lady Frances," interrupted Mrs. Smith, "I do beg that you will contradict the assertion wherever you hear it. It is not true, there is nothing in it, and I am not going to part with any of my children yet, although everyone *will* have it that Minnie is engaged to be married."

Lady Frances was not interested in disputing the question, and as far as the said Captain Lucas

was concerned, she thought it very probable that there was indeed "nothing in it," since according to Mrs. Smith's own showing he was not overburdened with this world's goods, and she was well aware that no empty-handed suitor, would ever be favourably regarded at the Oaks. She therefore quietly remarked, "When you tell me that one of your daughters is going to be married, I will believe it, but not before. Now it is a long walk for you home again, and we are soon going to have luncheon, so will you not all stay? Blanche has been having the croquet-ground mown, and they will be arranging a game I daresay. They seem very merry out there."

"Dear Blanche seems very well, and in high spirits. I was afraid from not seeing any of you yesterday, that one of you might have been ill. I will go and tell the dear girls you are kind enough to wish us to stay to luncheon. They will be delighted I am sure, only we are so very large a party!" answered Mrs. Smith.

"Not at all," said Lady Frances, rising and ringing the bell, "Mr. Lennox is not at home. He is staying with the Bishop for a few days, and it was for that reason that we did not go to the Archery-meeting yesterday. The girls do not like going without a gentleman, and as it is getting late now for out-door amusements, I was not sorry to get off it myself."

Having given the necessary directions to the

servant who entered, for the addition of so many places at the luncheon table, Lady Frances followed Mrs. Smith into the garden, that lady having already found her way there. On seeing Lady Frances, the eldest Miss Smith disengaged herself from the group assembled on the lawn, and running up to her, exclaimed, "Oh, dear Lady Frances, it is so good of you to ask us to stay. Blanche has been getting her croquet-ground into such beautiful order, and we are to have no end of a game after luncheon!"

Smiling at the young lady's *empressement*, Lady Frances assured her it gave her great pleasure to see them all there. "And you are right," she added, "to make the most of the fine days now, as when once in the 'bers' we don't know how many may still be left to us."

It was one of those brilliant days early in the month of September, which one seems to prize doubly, under the consciousness that summer is rapidly changing into autumn, and winter is not far off. The party on the lawn, seemed to be quite of Lady Frances' opinion that they could not make too much of the day, and were eagerly arranging "sides" and other preliminaries for their afternoon's amusement. There were four Miss Smiths, or rather, Miss Fraser Smiths, as their mamma was particular about calling them, and they had come over on this occasion in full force, to tell "dear Blanche Lennox" all about the

delightful meeting and ball, they had had the day before, and were escorted by a couple of officers from the dépôt in the neighbouring garrison town, who were staying with them for a few days. Mr. Fraser Smith was away from home on business, and in his absence the young ladies managed their mamma pretty much as they pleased.

"So fortunate Captain Lucas and Mr. Montague were able to get leave, wasn't it?" whispered the second Miss Smith to Blanche Lennox. "Papa being away just now, you know he so much dislikes any of the officers coming over."

Blanche was saved the necessity of making any rejoinder to this questionable confidence, by her mother coming up to her, and saying,

"Where is Bibi, Blanche dear? I thought she was with you." Then in a lower tone, she added, "Come with me for a moment, I want to speak to you love." And placing her hand on her daughter's arm, she withdrew her a short distance from the others, to give her some directions for the housekeeper, with regard to the unexpected increase to their luncheon party, which she begged her to convey at once, "as poor Statham will be puzzled at so short a notice; and tell her to make haste," she concluded.

Blanche kissed Lady Frances on the forehead, said "Yes, darling," and flew off to execute her bidding. Her mother gazed after her for a moment with fond admiration ere she turned to her guests,

and made some enquiry of the youngest Miss Smith, as to who had won the Archery prizes the day before. And before she comes back, I will endeavour to describe for your benefit, gentle reader, what Blanche Lennox was like.

Picture to yourself, then, a young girl of eighteen, very 'winsome,' to use a Scotch expression which exactly applied to her, and very fair. Her features were not one of them regular, but each and all were charming. Laughing blue eyes, a pretty nose, (I do not know how else to characterize it, it was neither Roman, nor *retroussé*, nor too big, nor too small, but) just the nose for the little coaxing face with its rosy lips, showing the pearly teeth peeping out roguishly from between them, and its dimpled chin, and the softly-tinted cheeks to which it belonged. Her hair was of that light golden brownish shade which seems one colour in one light, and another in another. She wore it gathered off her face in front, and plaited in a coronal which did not come too forward on the top of her head. On the morning in question, she was attired in a striped muslin dress, gathered high at the throat, and daintily trimmed with lace. Like all people who are not very tall, she was fond of long dresses, and carried a tolerable train after her wherever she went. A coquettish little apron of light blue silk: the pockets of which were also ornamented with narrow white lace, a long sash of blue silk streaming from her waist,

and a small turban hat with a blue wing in it, which she carried in her hand, completed her costume. She was in one word, the most fascinating little creature, reader, you can imagine, and to look upon her was to love her—you could not do otherwise.

That is what Blanche Lennox was *like*, and yet when I think of the dazzling vision which rises before me as I call to mind what she was at that time, I feel as if I had very far from succeeded in depicting her as I would.

What she *was* I will not tell you now, reader, but you shall find out from my story yourself.

Blanche was not long gone, and when she returned, it was with a serio-comic look and a shaking head that she approached the others, "We shall not be a full eight after all," she exclaimed, "Bibi is gone out for the day, I find, and so now we shall be an odd number, unless one will take two balls."

"Where is Bibi gone?" asked Lady Frances, looking somewhat surprised.

"To Mrs. Gregory's, Statham says, and she did not expect to be back till dinner time. Mrs. Gregory sent a note it seems after breakfast," added Blanche in a low voice to her mother, "and wanted her to go at once, so she left word with Statham and went."

"Don't you think it would be better to have six then?" asked the youngest Miss Smith, address-

ing the company in general. "I do not care about playing, and would just as soon look on."

"Nonsense, Minnie," and "Now, Miss Minnie, that is too bad," were the several rejoinders her remark elicited, from her sisters and the gentlemen respectively.

"No, Minnie dear," said Blanche decisively, "that wont do. But as you play delightfully badly, you shall be on the strong side and I will have two balls on the other, which will give us some chance."

"Miss Minnie has not recovered the fatigues of last night's ball, I suspect," said Lady Frances, smilingly.

"Dancing every dance is no joke, you know," observed Mr. Montague, a hero in his teens, stroking an imaginary moustache with one hand as he spoke, and kicking about the painted croquet-balls with his right foot, in a careless manner.

At this moment, a servant appeared, with the announcement that luncheon was ready, and the whole party adjourned to the house.

"What a stunning Rectory this is," remarked Captain Lucas to the eldest Miss Smith, as they entered the dining-room together. Captain Lucas was a dark man, with a *blasé* appearance, whose father was the incumbent of a small living in one of the Northern Counties.

"Yes," returned the young lady, "Mr. Lennox

was a great friend of the late bishop, and he gave him the living which is the best in the diocese. The Lennoxes are very rich, I believe." This was said in a low confidential tone.

"Indeed," rejoined the captain meditatively.

Having deposited his fair companion on the first vacant chair, he hurried up to Blanche's side begging that he might be of use.

"Montague couldn't carve a chicken to save his life, Miss Lennox," he said, "but if you will allow me to try my hand on that for you, I shall be proud."

"Thank you," said Blanche quietly, "I think I can manage this myself, if you will kindly help mamma. But I see Mrs. Smith is doing that, so you must just attend to the young ladies, and then take care of yourself, Captain Lucas."

Mr. Montague's "Ha! ha!" and a smile from the eldest Miss Smith at his discomfiture, did not make the gallant captain feel amiably disposed, as he retreated to an empty place between that young lady and her sister Minnie, and in spite of the endeavours of both to draw him into conversation, they could get nothing more out of him than Yes and No, for some time.

As Mr. Lennox, of whom Mrs. Fraser Smith was always rather afraid, was absent, that lady was perfectly in her element, assisting gentle Lady Frances in doing the honours of the table. "Do have some of this, Minnie love? Pass me the

potatoes will you, Montague ! Remember, dears, you have a long walk before you," and such like speeches she gave utterance to from time to time, not forgetting to press upon Lady Frances everything she partook of herself, and rallying Blanche on her want of appetite.

"Too much parish work, Blanche love, I am sure you are working yourself to death. You must come over and spend a nice long day with us, and have a return match on our ground. We have an attraction now to offer you, you see," and Mrs. Smith glanced significantly in the direction of the gloomy captain and his military companion.

But Blanche was helping her chicken busily, and only smiled and said, "Thanks, I should like it very much," in a very ordinary unimpressed sort of way.

"Don't you think Blanche Lennox is very nice-looking?" asked Miss Smith, giving up the captain in despair, and addressing Mr. Montague who sat on the other side of her, "there is such a buzz going on that you may safely tell me." And she accompanied the request with a look which plainly said, "You had better be careful."

Mr. Montague was not a gentleman of many ideas, and just now such as he had were chiefly engrossed by the study of what was before him. Not catching exactly the purport of the question, he answered,

"Very good indeed, excellent," and returned to the consideration of his luncheon.

"No, I don't mean that," said the young lady, who thought he alluded to Blanche's goodness of expression, "but do you think she is pretty? Some people admire her very much."

"Oh! ah!" exclaimed the youth, thinking that he knew what she was "driving at." "Do I think Miss Lennox pretty, do you mean? Well! you know," and here he glanced first at Blanche's pure sweet face which was lighted up with animation at the moment, as she discussed with Minnie Smith some expedition to a neighbouring show-place they were planning together, and then looked at the eager and by no means unprepossessing countenance which was turned towards him, "there are many people I daresay who would think so, but I admire—" and he gazed straight into the eyes of his interrogator, with an expression which left no doubt as to his meaning.

"Oh! don't be silly, Mr. Montague," said Miss Smith, and then as he had expressed himself exactly as she intended him to do, she changed the subject and called across the table to her mother, "We mustn't be too late going home, mamma, you know, as the Lethbridges dine with us this evening."

"Ah! so they do," observed Mrs. Smith, and turning to Lady Frances, she added, "Quite a

small affair, only ourselves and the Colonel and Mrs. Lethbridge. They are coming in a friendly way as we could not have any party in Mr. Fraser Smith's absence you know."

"Exactly," said Lady Frances, "and in that case, young ladies, I think the sooner you begin your game the better."

A general rise from the table then took place, and in a very few minutes they were all again on the lawn, where the hoops being placed, the business of croquet commenced in earnest. Captain Lucas and the three younger Miss Smiths on one side, and Mr. Montague, Miss Smith and Blanche with two balls on the other. Lady Frances and Mrs. Fraser Smith seated themselves at a little distance from the players, and a servant placed a small table near his mistress, on which stood her basket and working materials. "I always provide myself with occupation on these occasions," said Lady Frances, "I can work and talk at the same time, and then I don't feel as if I was an utterly useless member of society."

When Captain Lucas described the impression which Wentmore Rectory made upon him, as "stunning," he expressed briefly and characteristically, what most persons felt on visiting that abode for the first time. It was not only the exterior fashion of the building, which in size resembled more a gentleman's country mansion than an ordinary Parsonage house, that struck the

beholder, but the arrangement of the interior was as remarkable as the outside was imposing. That the rooms were spacious and well built, was to the credit of the architect originally employed upon them, but the perfect taste exhibited in their fittings and adornment was due to Lady Frances Lennox, who carried with her into her husband's home, the notions of elegance and comfort which she had imbibed in her father's princely abode, and which gave so *distingué* an air to all that surrounded her. You felt on entering Wentmore Rectory, that you were in a thorough "Gentleman's house." There was nothing pretentious or fine or unbecoming the residence of a clergyman about it, but wherever the eye rested, the impression conveyed to the mind was that the right thing was in the right place, and an air of refinement pervaded the whole.

From where Mrs. Fraser Smith sat, she could obtain between the curtains lined with pink which fell on each side of the drawing-room windows, glimpses of an apartment so elegantly and charmingly fitted up, that many persons coming from houses of their own, where everything that was costly and elegant surrounded them, would exclaim, "Lady Frances Lennox's is the prettiest room I have ever seen!" Mrs. Smith acknowledged this herself, though she would have been puzzled to say what constituted the charm about

the Wentmore drawing-room. Her own house was well furnished. Mr. Smith was a well-to-do man, and liked to have "good" things about him as he often declared. "None of your rubbish and fandanglery. I like substance and comfort." And substance and comfort accordingly he had; but still something was wanting as his wife felt, feeling also, alas, that she was unable to supply it herself, or even positively to say what it was. Now this "something" everything about Lady Frances had, and as Mrs. Smith turned her eyes from the house and its surroundings, to the mistress of the Rectorial domain, seated in her low garden chair, whilst her delicate high-bred looking fingers diligently plied the long ivory needles with which she was manufacturing a large soft-looking and many coloured *couverpied*, the only kind of work, to use her own expression, she was now "fit for," she owned to herself that the air of calm dignity and repose, which pervaded Lady Frances, was thoroughly in keeping with all about her.

"How lovely your verandah is looking now, Lady Frances, and what numbers of roses you have," observed Mrs. Smith, "I am so fond of flowers, but somehow our garden never looks as well as yours."

"Mr. Lennox takes great pleasure and pride in his garden," was the reply, "and Blanche and I

keep the old gardener up to the mark in his absence, as we like to have plenty of flowers in the house always. I think they make any room look nice, and I wonder so much when I see persons who have gardens and conservatories not caring to have the produce of either in their houses."

"Your rooms always look so nice, and the flowers are always beautifully arranged. I suppose that is Blanche's taste?" said Mrs. Smith.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Smith, that *is* Blanche's taste, and I am glad you appreciate it," exclaimed Blanche, who happened to be standing near and overheard the last remark.

"Blanche! Blanche! it is your turn," resounded from her "side," and the young girl was soon following her ball far across the croquet-ground.

"I suppose you will be expecting your sons again before long?" resumed Mrs. Smith, as she watched Blanche's form receding in the distance. "My girls were saying the other day how long it seemed since we had seen anything of them. It was rather too bad of Ferdinand to spend his long vacation in Switzerland this time, having given us so little of his society at Christmas."

Mrs. Fraser Smith and her family, having lived in Mr. Lennox's parish for many years, and known the young Lennoxes from their childhood, always spoke of them by their Christian names.

Lady Frances would have resented this, if she had not considered it justified, by the intimacy which had existed for so long between the families.

"Ferdinand will spend a week or two with us, before he goes back to Oxford," she replied. "He has enjoyed his foreign trip immensely. He returned to England some days ago, and would have been with us before this, but his friend, Sir George Hamilton, with whom he was travelling, insisted on carrying him off to his place in Warwickshire first. We expect him however very soon now."

"I never know which is dear Blanche's favourite brother," remarked Mrs. Smith. "You are very happy, Lady Frances, in seeing them all so much attached to each other."

"Yes, thank God," said Lady Frances, with something like a sigh. "I don't think Blanche loves one more than the other. She and Ferdinand are more of an age, and have naturally been thrown most together; but in disposition I think she resembles Gerald most, and certainly no two brothers could be more devoted to a sister than they both are to her," and again the speaker gave a little sigh.

"I heard that Gerald was not looking well when he was down here last, was that so?" enquired Mrs. Smith.

"His visit was a very hurried one," answered

Lady Frances, "and he had not been well in London before he came. I was uneasy about his looks, and told him so, but he assured me nothing was the matter, and I have not heard of his being unwell since; but he never mentions his health when he writes, and indeed, although he used to be such a good correspondent, he has not kept up his character as one of late."

At this juncture, Lady Frances's work happened to get into confusion, and it took her some time to arrange it again. When she had done so, she resumed the conversation on a different topic, and so the afternoon wore on, until Mrs. Smith rising from her seat, exclaimed, "These long games never will finish, and I must get them to put an end to this one or we shall not be home in time. Laura! Minnie!" she cried, "are you winning, my dears?"

"No, mamma," answered Laura Smith, the second daughter, running up. "Minnie has been playing so abominably, we have not had a chance. It will be a drawn game as both Captain Lucas and Blanche are rovers, and the others are ever so far behind."

"I think," said Lady Frances smiling, and rising from her chair, "that that is the best way of ending these severe contests, and then no one can feel especially aggrieved. You are very fond of croquet, Laura, are you not?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Laura, "but I have always

to be helping Minnie when she is on my side, and so I cannot get on a bit."

"Minnie would play very well," interposed Mrs. Fraser Smith, who was arranging her shawl and looking for her gloves, and making other preparations for departure, "but she does not practise enough. Isn't that it, Minnie love?"

"Oh, I can't make myself a slave to anything as Laura and Bella do," answered Miss Minnie, who was swinging her mallet about very much to her own satisfaction, but to the imminent peril of anyone near. "They practise from morning till night. I don't care about playing unless there is some one to play with!"

"Oh, fie, fie!" said Mrs. Smith, laughing, "that means unless there are some gentlemen of the party, you naughty puss! But now my dears, make haste, and say good-bye, we must be going;" and turning to Lady Frances, she began her adieux and thanks for their pleasant afternoon. "So kind of you, dear Lady Frances, and we have enjoyed it so much."

"I will walk with you to the gate," cried Blanche, and putting her arm through Minnie's she led the way down the drive. "Do you like that Captain Lucas, Minnie?" she said, as they found themselves some way ahead of the rest of the party. "I saw you talking to him a great deal, but there is something I don't like, and I am sure I never should like about him."

"I think I know what you mean," answered Minnie, laughing, "I don't care for him really an atom. Why, I only met him once before last night, when he was at the Archery Ball, and mamma asked him to come over to-day with Mr. Montague. He does very well when there is no one else, but that is all."

Blanche looked at the speaker for a moment, and then apparently satisfied with her assertion, stood still and allowed the others to come up, when she took leave of them all, and returned slowly to the croquet ground, her eyes cast down and evidently lost in thought. Lady Frances saw her approaching, and exclaimed, "Well, are they gone, darling? I hope you are not tired, my pet? I saw you had two balls which I know is tiring work."

"Oh, no! mamma, darling," answered the young girl gaily, "we had a capital game, and I am not in the least tired. Now dear," she continued, going up to her mother and kissing her, "you go in and lie down, I am sure Mrs. Smith has tired *you*, and I will have these things taken in."

Lady Frances smiled, and taking up her work, slowly entered the house. Blanche then seized her mallet, and knocking the balls together, placed them in the open box which stood on one side of the ground. "My beloved blue ball!" she murmured, as she did so. "How well you behaved!"

and that horrid light yellow"—(Captain Lucas had played with a ball of that colour)—“gave you a great deal of trouble, but you never will be beaten, will you?” and she placed the ball carefully in the box, the lid of which she closed, then passing through the verandah into the drawing-room, she rang the bell and desired the footman who appeared to bring it in.

“Miss Barbara was asking for you, Miss, just now,” said the man, “I told her the ladies and gentlemen were just gone, and she said she would go to your room and wait for you.”

“Is Miss Barbara in, then?” exclaimed Blanche, “when did she return?”

“A quarter of an hour ago, Miss,” was the answer.

Blanche immediately left the room, and hurrying up the broad staircase which led from the entrance hall to the upper story of the house, she passed down a long passage, and opening the door of her own apartment, she entered it and looked round expectantly.

“Bibi! are you here?” she cried. But she could see no one as she glanced round the room, which half boudoir and half sleeping-chamber, seemed a fitting abode for so bright a little fairy as herself.

There was no answer, and she was about to leave the room again when a form advanced from the window, the chintz curtains of which had con-

cealed it from view, and in another instant she was clasped in the arms of a young girl, some two or three years older than herself, taller and darker, whose large black eyes were filled with tears, and who drew her towards the open window of the room, and kissed her again and again without speaking.

"Bibi, dear! is anything the matter? You frighten me," exclaimed Blanche, disengaging herself from the other's embrace, and looking up in her face. "What is it?—nothing about the boys?"

By the "boys," Blanche meant her brothers, both of whom were a good deal older than herself, but whom she always spoke of as if they were still the boy-brothers of some years back.

"Gerald," was the answer, "he is not ill—but read that," and Barbara Lennox placed a letter in the other's hand as she spoke.

"What is it—tell me!" faltered Blanche, sinking into a chair. "I can't read—tell me," and with trembling hands she tried to open the letter.

"He has become a Roman Catholic," said Barbara. "I knew he would! Oh! Blanche, darling, don't!"

And she threw herself on her knees beside the chair, as Blanche covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW hours later.

The clock of the Parish Church of Wentmore had struck ten, and all was hushed in the village street below. The only building which gave signs of life was the Bull Inn, from the tap-room of which occasional sounds of merriment burst forth and echoed down the silent thoroughfare which was dignified by the name of the High Street. This highly respectable "House of Entertainment for man and beast," had, like most of its compeers, known better days in the good old coaching era. It was a picturesque looking place enough, and stood at one end of the village, just below the church, and opposite the entrance of an old Elizabethan mansion surrounded by a spacious garden and fronted by a court-yard in which dwelt a widow lady, Mrs. Gregory, and her niece, Miss Seymour, whom Lady Frances Lennox always spoke of as the "Good Angel" of the Parish, but our business is not with them at present. Past

the inn beyond the main street, and bordering the turnpike road which led towards the county town some ten miles off, stood a row of small cottages, very humble tenements, and occupied solely by labourers and their families, the poorest of the poor inhabitants of this agricultural spot. From the upper window of one of these, a light reflected upon the road below, and if you listened attentively you might distinguish through the partially open casement, the sound of a man's voice evidently in prayer, that rising and falling sound which it is impossible to mistake. It is into this cottage and into the small confined room from which this sound proceeded, that I must conduct my reader.

It was a miserable place. Signs of dire poverty and want were observable on all sides. A small ricketty table on which was placed a flaring tallow candle stuck in the neck of an empty bottle, stood in front of the window. On one side of this was a chair piled with sundry odds and ends which had evidently been swept from the table, their ordinary resting-place, and deposited there as the only place for them excepting the floor. On the other was a low box on which was seated an old woman, who with her arms folded on her breast, rocked herself to and fro as an accompaniment to the prayers which a clergyman was saying who knelt by the side of a bed which formed the principal and only remaining article of furniture in the room.

On this bed lay one who was evidently dying. Rose Upton was still young, but that fell disease, consumption, had done its work upon her, and the end was drawing near. The heavy laboured breathing, the deadly pallor of the face, the restless movement of the hands told their own tale. She was conscious, and every now and then would make a painful effort to say something, but each time she did so it was more difficult to catch the meaning of her words than before. The Curate of the Parish whose voice as I have said might be heard by any passer-by in the road below, repeated the prayers for the dying, and half kneeling, half standing as she supported the poor girl's head with her left arm, whilst from time to time she moistened her parched lips with some cooling drink, was the Rector's daughter, Blanche Lennox.

Presently the clergyman arose, and taking one of the sufferer's wasted hands in his, held it a moment without speaking. Blanche looked at him and then at the dying girl. "I think she will sleep now, Mr. Woods," she said in a low tone.

But low as it was, Rose caught the words, and she seized hold of Blanche's arm as the latter had disengaged it gently from beneath her head, and gasped out, "You are not going, Miss?"

"I must go now, Rose," answered Blanche, bending over her, "but I will come again in the morning, and you must try and get a good sleep."

And she smiled sweetly, though her eyes were full of tears as she spoke.

"But, Miss, you will promise me—about Jenny. You know what I said—you'll look after her, wont you? And ask Mr. Ferdinand—he is so good. Don't, don't let her do as I have done! Poor Jenny, she's there now, I know."

A burst of loud violent weeping, which proceeded from some one close outside the door of the room was heard as the girl ceased speaking. Blanche felt sure it was Jane Upton, Rose's younger sister, and for whom she was thus appealing to her sympathies. And she was right. Crouched at the head of the stairs, her head buried in her hands, and in a perfect agony of grief, was poor Jane listening to all that passed in that room where her sister lay dying, but which she had been sternly forbidden by her mother to enter, whilst the "Parson and Miss Blanche was there."

"Yes, yes, I will remember, and I will speak to Mr. Ferdinand about her," said Blanche, soothingly. "We expect him very soon, and I know he will do all he can for her."

"God bless you—keep her from it—keep her from it."

Rose's voice grew very faint, and she lay back exhausted on the pillows.

"She's going! she's going!" cried the old

woman, rushing up to the bed, and beginning to sob loudly. Then turning towards the door she half opened it, and said angrily, "What are you making that noise for, when the gentleman and Miss Blanche is here? be quiet, do." Pushing it to again, she then half flung herself upon the bed, and burst afresh into violent sobs and exclamations of despair.

"Do not distress yourself so, Mrs. Upton," said Mr. Woods, quietly, "she is not any worse just now, and might get some sleep if she is kept quiet. When do you expect Mr. Findlay again?"

"He said he should look in tomorrow morning, sir. But she'll never hold out till then."

Mr. Woods did not think she would, but he turned cheerfully towards the dying girl, and said, "I will call in early, Rose, to see how you are, and if you want me, your mother will send at any hour. Good night."

The young woman looked up at him wistfully, and touched his hand as she said, "Good night and thank you sir."

Mr. Woods turned to leave the room, and Blanche prepared to follow him. Ere doing so, however, she again bent over the poor girl, and said, "You feel comfortable, don't you, Rose?"

Rose smiled, but did not speak.

"You have got your little cross?" continued Blanche gently. "Yes, I see," she added, as the other drew a small black wooden cross from

beneath the sheet and shewed it her. " You can kiss that when you feel too tired to pray, and repeat the Name of JESUS as often as you can. Think of Him and how He loves you. I will pray for you. Good night."

" Good night, Miss," whispered Rose. Then as Blanche moved from her side, she suddenly raised herself in the bed, and caught hold of her, crying, " Heaven bless you, dear Miss Blanche, heaven bless you for what you have been to me!"

Blanche did not answer. She could not have steadied her voice sufficiently to do so, but she re-arranged the pillows as Rose fell back upon them, and pressing a soft kiss upon the pale damp forehead of the dying girl, she hastily left the room.

Mr. Woods, the Curate, was waiting in the room below for her, and as she descended the winding uneven stair, he held a candle to light her, saying, " Take care, Miss Lennox, you must be careful how you come." Then as she landed safely at the bottom, he added, " I have been talking to Jane here, and she will send for me if Rose wishes it during the night. I don't think myself she will last till the morning."

" Oh ! sir ! don't say that," cried a voice from the corner of the room. " Oh ! Rosey, Rosey, oh dear, oh dear !" and a violent burst of weeping succeeded.

Blanche turned, and in the dim light which the

solitary candle shed over the poverty-stricken place, she discerned the figure of a girl about her own age who stood shaking and crying in one corner.

"Is that you, Jane?" she said. "Don't cry so, my poor girl, that will only vex your mother and do poor Rose no good. You must pray for her and for yourself too, that you may be able to bear the parting when it comes."

And as she spoke she laid her hand on the girl's shoulder. The simple white muslin dress she wore, covered by her dark waterproof cloak forming a striking contrast to the slatternly and neglected appearance of the other whose hair hung in disorder over her shoulders.

"Oh, Miss, I can't pray, I don't know how," sobbed the girl. "Oh dear! oh dear!"

At that moment a tap was heard at the cottage door, and it opened gently to admit two female figures, who advanced a few steps into the room, and in the foremost of whom Blanche recognised her cousin, Barbara Lennox. "Is that you, Bibi?" she said.

"Yes, dear," answered the other, "we were getting uneasy about you, and I have come to take you home. Is poor Rose any better?"

Blanche shook her head. "I will come directly," she said. "Good night Jane. Good night Mr. Woods," and she held out her hand to the young clergyman as she spoke.

He kept it for a moment and looked in her face.

"Miss Lennox, take care of yourself,—you will be knocked up," he said anxiously. Then colouring and letting her hand fall, he added, "I will stay a minute to talk to poor Jane. Good night."

Turning to Barbara and her companion, he shook hands with them and held the door open for them to pass out.

"Hester has brought her lantern," said Barbara, as they emerged from the cottage, "and she will let us have it to go home with when we have deposited her at her own door. Blanche, darling, I wish you had not come," she continued, in a low tone, as she put her arm through her cousin's, "you ought not to have gone out this evening, but it was of no use my saying anything to you."

"It has done me good," was the answer. "Dear Hester, poor Rose will not want any more grapes from you I am afraid," and Blanche turned towards the silent figure who walked on her other side.

"Ah! poor girl, I thought she would not last much longer," was the response, in a low sweet tone. And the three walked on in silence.

At the entrance of the court-yard which fronted the Elizabethan mansion already alluded to, Miss Seymour took leave of the cousins and armed with her lantern, they proceeded on their way to the Rectory. In less than ten minutes they were within its gates, and then as they slowly ap-

proached the house, Blanche said, "Is mamma gone to bed? I hope so?"

"Yes," replied Barbara, "she went up stairs when Hester said good night, and I put on my bonnet to go with her, promising to bring you back."

"Poor mamma! darling mamma!" murmured Blanche, as though to herself. "She will feel it so dreadfully, worse even than papa, I think."

"And Ferdinand," said Barbara.

"Go to my room will you, Bibi," said Blanche, "and wait there till I come. I must just say good night, and will be with you directly."

"She would not trust herself to speak of Ferdinand," thought Barbara, as she walked towards Blanche's room. "Poor fellow! what a terrible blow for him! How could Gerald be so wicked, so cruel!" As if angered by the thought, she impatiently threw off her bonnet and shawl as she entered her cousin's apartment, and flung herself on a low couch to await Blanche's return.

In a few minutes she heard her footsteps in the passage, and Blanche entered the room. "I have told Elizabeth I shall not want her, and I am not going to keep you up, Bibi dear," she said, as she walked up to the chimney-piece and stood leaning her arm against it, "but I wanted to ask you if you had said anything at Mrs. Gregory's?"

"No," answered Barbara, "I did not. I was afraid Hester might say something before Aunt

Lennox, and I thought it better not. I was with them when the letters came this afternoon, and Mrs. Gregory luckily was so occupied with her own, that she did not see how much upset I was by mine from Gerald. I said I must go home immediately, as I might have to write before the post went out, after seeing you, and then came away."

"Was it addressed to you? I thought I saw Ferdinand's name on the envelope," said Blanche, as she stretched out her hand and took from a book on the table, a letter which lay between the leaves.

"It is to him, and in his absence to be opened by Miss Barbara Lennox, if you notice," was the answer.

"Ah! that was because he wished to spare me the shock," said Blanche, musingly, "poor fellow!"

"I am too angry with him to pity him," cried Barbara, impetuously. "After all his protestations and declarations, and 'everyone might turn Roman Catholic, but *he* never would,' and all that sort of thing. But I always thought it would end so with him."

"I thought it lately, but only very lately," said Blanche. "Something he said the last time he was here, startled me. Something about its being the last time he should hear some chant the boys were going to sing in church. I don't remember

exactly what it was now, but I know I remarked it at the time."

"Good night, darling," said Barbara, starting up. "I shall come and see you directly I am up. Sleep well, and don't stay up late." Then kissing her cousin affectionately, she left the room.

Blanche took off her dress, threw a loose *peignoir* over her shoulders, and then cast herself on her knees before a low *prie dieu* which stood near the bed. Long and earnestly she prayed for her parents, that they might have strength to support the trial which awaited them, for herself and all dear to her, especially the two brothers, for each of whom she felt so much in a different way, and for the poor dying girl from whom she had that evening parted, as she felt probably for the last time. It was late in spite of her cousin's warning when she sought her couch, and then it was some time before sleep visited her eyes. They were wet with tears when they closed, and even in her sleep she murmured occasionally the names of "Gerald" and "Ferdinand." For some hours her rest was broken and uneasy, until towards morning she sank into a heavy slumber, from which she did not awake until her maid had entered her room for the third time to warn her how late it was getting.

Lady Frances was in the habit of breakfasting in her own room, and when Mr. Lennox was absent, Blanche usually read prayers, unless one of

her brothers was at home. When she descended this morning however, she found that Barbara had ordered the tea urn to be brought in, and was pouring out the tea as she entered the room. " You were so dreadfully late, Blanche, darling," cried she, on seeing her cousin, " that I thought it was better not to wait any longer. I came twice to your room, but you were so fast asleep I did not like to disturb you."

Blanche kissed the speaker and made a show of eating some breakfast. She looked pale, and said but little in response to the comments and conversation which Barbara thought it necessary to keep up, and as soon as she could do so, left the room and went up stairs to see her mother; pausing a moment, ere she turned the handle of Lady Frances's door to assume with an effort her ordinary cheerful and unoccupied manner.

Left alone, Barbara passed through the hall into the garden from the front of the house, and seating herself on a rustic bench beneath some large elms which stood on the lawn, she opened a book and prepared to read ; but her eyes wandered from the page, and for many minutes she remained lost in thought. It was a lovely morning, the birds sang merrily overhead, and the distant sounds of country life came pleasantly over the meadows which, divided from the flower-garden by a light iron railing, stretched far away in the distance, and gave a park-like appearance to the

grounds. Sitting where she did, Barbara Lennox formed the centre of a very pretty picture. The brilliant hues of the flowers fancifully arranged in beds and borders which lined the turf, the soft green of the lawn, the shade cast by the over-hanging trees, the well-gravelled paths which led to shrubberies and kitchen-gardens beyond, all combined to render the *mise en scène* as perfect as it could be. And Barbara, as she sat in her cool-looking, well made summer dress, with an air of deep and anxious thought upon her brow, was one who would have arrested the attention of the beholder under any circumstances.

Barbara Lennox was an orphan. She scarcely remembered her mother, and had no recollection whatever of her father. She had grown up from a child under the care of a grandmother, who some two years before our story begins had died, leaving her a small independent fortune, and since that time she had resided with her uncle, Mr. Lennox, at Wentmore. Her acquaintance with her aunt and cousins until then had been but slight. Her uncle, who was her father's elder and only brother, she had occasionally seen when old Mrs. Harvey had taken her to London for a few weeks, which she had done latterly once a year, in order that her granddaughter might have the benefit of masters and obtain advantages which she could not hope for in the country, and Mr. Lennox had made a point of calling whenever business obliged him to

visit the metropolis during the old lady's stay. Barbara looked forward to these visits eagerly. Her uncle was always most kind and fatherly in his manner to her. She reminded him greatly of his lost brother, the pride and the pet of his father's house, and for his sake he made it an understood thing that if ever his niece should want another home, she was to find it with him. On Mrs. Harvey's death, therefore, he gladly welcomed her as an inmate of the Rectory, and a companion for his own darling Blanche.

But a greater contrast than the two girls presented, can scarcely be imagined.

Barbara was some three years older, as we have already stated, than her cousin. She had seen much more of the world, and had a considerable opinion of her own powers and of what was due to herself and others. Blanche, on the contrary, was as unsophisticated and unassuming a little thing as could be met with anywhere. Barbara had always been accustomed to have very much her own way about everything, and in her grandmother's house her will had been law. Lady Frances Lennox, although gentleness and hospitality itself, was the last person to allow anyone but herself to direct matters in her own house, and Blanche consistently upheld her mother's authority. Under this restraint Barbara chafed, and although she did not dare openly to rebel in Lady Frances's presence, she freely vented her

displeasure at other times. Her own mother had not been of a "good" family in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Captain Lennox had met her at a county ball, in the town where he chanced to be quartered with his regiment, and had fallen in love with her pretty face and engaging manner at first sight. Annie Harvey was not hard to win, and her father, a wealthy retired merchant, was only too glad to form an alliance with one of the "real old families," with whom he found it hard to establish a footing of intimacy. Old Mr. Lennox did not like the marriage, and for some time refused to see his son or his young wife; but the untiring efforts of the elder brother, who never had rested until he had attained his object, at length effected a reconciliation between the father and his favourite child. Reginald Lennox himself had married not long before, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Norwood, and his having done so, added doubtless to his influence over his father at the time. The old gentleman was proud of the connexion, and liked to shew his friends and neighbours the place in the family pedigree where the houses of Stewart and Lennox had been united some generations before.

"Just after the Restoration," he would say, "my ancestor married an aunt (with several 'greats' prefixed to her name) of Norwood's, and we have kept up the family connexion ever since. So Reginald and Lady Frances are cousins you

see." When Mr. Harvey died, he left the largest portion of his wealth to a nephew whom he had never seen, nor cared for, but who "would not be ashamed of his old uncle," he said, and this was a hit at the pride of the Lennox family, which had offended him greatly. He left his daughter a very fair share; however, and although before Geoffrey Lennox died, he had dissipated a considerable portion of this, his widow was looked upon as a "catch," by several speculating bachelors, who had formed the acquaintance of the gay young cavalry officer and his pretty wife. She however remained faithful to her husband's memory, for the short period during which she survived him. Barbara was not six years old when Mrs. Lennox succumbed to a fever she caught whilst tending the sick bed of a poor person, and deprived at that early age of a mother's vigilant care and watchfulness, she had soon discovered the way to manage 'grandmamma,' and grew up entirely her own mistress as we have stated; her naturally good disposition making her generally liked amongst her acquaintance and friends, and the faults to which her doting grandmother was blind, remaining unchecked, and taking root to bring forth bitter fruit hereafter.

Barbara's thoughts, as we have said, had wandered far away from the scene before her, and she had sat for some time in the same attitude, undisturbed by the approach of anything more dis-

tracting than an occasional bee or butterfly, when the sound of wheels on the carriage-drive before the house caused her hastily to look up, and as the house bell rang loudly, she ran through the verandah into the drawing-room, and peeped through the half-open door which led into the hall to see who or what the arrival might be. It was a fly from the neighbouring railway station with luggage on the roof ; and hardly had it stopped at the door, when she heard and recognised a voice which brought the colour to her cheeks and caused her to take a hasty glance at the long glass near which she stood. She was just rushing forward with the exclamation of “ Ferdinand ! ” on her lips, when she suddenly stopped, and with the recollection of the news which awaited her cousin, remained hesitating near the drawing-room door, as a young man in a travelling cap and light Inverness cape which he threw off on entering the hall, advanced towards her.

Ferdinand Lennox was a fresh-coloured, sunny-looking youth, whose strong likeness to his sister Blanche would at once have established their relationship in the mind of any beholder. His pleasant manner and genial nature made him a great favourite with all who knew him. His thorough good-heartedness and open fearless disposition won for him the regard and friendship of his fellow-students and equals in age, whilst his deep unaffected piety and undeviatingly right con-

duct procured for him the good opinion of his elders. With ladies of all ages he was popular, he seemed to have inherited his father's polished manners, with his mother's tact and power of pleasing all who came within his sphere. Old ladies declared he was more attentive and thoughtful than the young men of the present day as a rule. Fast young ladies liked him because he was always perfectly at his ease with them, witty and agreeable, and though he was pronounced "awfully good," they never felt afraid of him, and would leave the most slangy fellow of their acquaintance at any time to have half-an-hour's chat with Ferdinand Lennox. The quiet young ladies liked him because he was always ready to enter into all their little interests and excitements about the parish, the poor, and the schools, et cetera. His parents considered him perfect. His brother and sister thought there was no one like him in the world, "Excepting Gerald," Blanche would say, "and I never compare them for they are both of them nicest and best, only *perhaps* Ferdinand has the most common sense of the two." In Gerald's opinion his young brother certainly stood alone. His cousin Barbara thought him— No, I won't say what she thought about him, but will leave the reader to find that out for himself.

"Is that you, Bibi?" exclaimed the young man in a loud cheerful tone. "You didn't expect me did you? Where is everybody else?" and he

bestowed a hearty kiss upon her forehead as he spoke.

"Blanche is upstairs, Uncle Lennox has not come back yet, and my aunt is still in her room," answered Barbara, whilst the colour again flew to her face, and she drew back a little from her cousin's embrace.

"I didn't write to say when I should be here," said Ferdinand, looking smilingly at her as he spoke, "as I only knew yesterday myself, and I thought I should arrive before my letter. But now for the Lady Mother." Then rushing up the stairs two at a time, calling, "Blanche! Blanche! where are you?" he nearly tumbled over a stately dame in a dark silk dress who was coming out of a door at the head of the staircase, and who had barely time to exclaim with astonishment, "Master Ferdinand! is that you?" when he seized her in his arms and smothered her with kisses. "Yes, it is I!" he cried, "and how are you, you dear old thing?" But without waiting for any answer, he pushed on into his mother's room.

"Well! who would have thought it! Coming unexpected like that!" exclaimed Mrs. Statham, who had lived first as nurse and then as house-keeper in the Lennox family before "Master Ferdinand" was born, and looking round with a somewhat bewildered though satisfied smile, she arranged her cap and ribbons which had been slightly tumbled by the young Oxonian's uncere-

monious greeting, then catching sight of Barbara below, she called out, "Did you know he was come, Miss Barbara? I never heard anything drive up to the door!"

"Yes," replied Barbara, "I was in the garden and heard the fly coming up the drive. Is Miss Blanche with Aunt Lennox, Statham?"

"No, Miss. She went to her own room some minutes ago. I will go and tell her her brother is come, and see about his room being got ready for him. And John," cried Mrs. Statham over the balusters to the footman, who was collecting the luggage in the entrance hall, "bring Mr. Ferdinand's things upstairs, and — stay a minute, perhaps he will want some breakfast. I must ask him." So saying, she returned into her mistress's room.

Ferdinand was asking and answering questions in a breath, telling his mother she was looking "younger and prettier than ever," and that he "was 'so mad' at Gerald's not being able to get away from London just now, but he must and would have him down in a day or two," and Lady Frances was stroking his hair as he knelt by her side, and saying how glad and thankful she was to have him again.

"Breakfast!" he cried, as Mrs. Statham explained the reason of her return. "I've break-fasted hours ago! No, I shan't want anything till lunch time, though you may tell John to bring

me a glass of beer. But I must go and see my beauty B.," he added, turning to his mother, "and then I will come back again, dearest!" Kissing her again and in the exuberance of his spirits, giving delighted old Mrs. Statham another hug, he darted out of the room, tore down the stairs, and found himself in the drawing-room directly. It was empty; and with an exclamation of impatience he was turning to leave it, when Barbara and Blanche entered together. "Here you are! you good-for-nothing pet, I have been looking for you ever since I came!" and his arms were round his sister's neck, and she was pressed fondly to his heart again and again.

"But Blanche, how is this? Something is the matter?" Ferdinand exclaimed presently, as although returning his embrace with interest, Blanche did not speak, and the tears involuntarily stood in her eyes.

"Yes, dearest, there is something the matter," answered Blanche, leading him to an ottoman and putting her arm round his neck as she spoke. "I don't know how to tell you," and she turned away her face whilst the tears choked her further utterance.

"Blanche! Barbara! what is it?" cried the young man, turning from one to the other.

But Barbara too, turned away her head, and neither of them spoke until Blanche, holding out

a letter with her face still averted, said, "Read that. It is from Gerald. It will tell you all."

Ferdinand took the letter, and cast his eye hastily over it. No sooner had he read the first few lines, however, than he started up, rushed through a door which led into an adjoining room, and closed it violently behind him.

The girls remained motionless, looking at each other. Presently, Blanche said, "Poor fellow! I knew how much he would feel it—oh Barbara! what is to be done?" and she began to weep bitterly.

Barbara was perfectly calm. Seating herself by Blanche's side, she drew her gently towards her, and soothed her with loving words and caresses. She could hear Ferdinand pacing up and down in the next room as she did so.

"Blanche, darling," she said, "if you give way like this, how will you be able to comfort poor Ferdinand? And Aunt Lennox, think of her!"

Blanche looked up and smiled through her tears. "Yes, Bibi dear, I will not be foolish, but it is very terrible for me! We were all so happy together, and those two were so bound up in each other. I am sure Gerald must be wretched himself. Oh, if it could only have been prevented!"

At this moment the door opened, and Blanche turned away to conceal her face from observation.

"Miss Seymour wishes to see you, if you please, Miss," said the footman, who appeared in the

door-way, "she says she will not come in if you will speak to her one moment."

"Go, Bibi, I can't," said Blanche, hastily, and Barbara ran out into the hall.

Miss Seymour was standing outside the front door which usually stood open at Wentmore Rectory in fine weather, all day.

"I only came up to tell you poor Rose Upton was gone," she said, as Barbara advanced towards her. "Mr. Woods saw her early this morning, but she was unconscious, and died about eight o'clock."

"Thank you, dear," said Barbara, "for letting us know. Blanche is not very well. She was rather knocked up by her exertions yesterday. She ought not to have gone out last night, but I could not keep her from going to Rose. I will tell her. Did you know Ferdinand was come?"

Miss Seymour had not heard it. "I will not keep you, then, as I know you always have a great deal to say to each other. My aunt would be very glad to see you, if you can look in after lunch. She is not quite certain about the new stitch you were teaching her yesterday. Goodbye." And the young lady waved her hand and walked away.

Barbara gazed after her. Miss Seymour had included Blanche as well as Barbara in her own mind, when she spoke about the "great deal they would have to say to each other," but her listener thought she alluded to something personal. She

coloured with a feeling partly of surprise and partly of satisfaction. "Can Ferdinand ever have said anything to her about me?" she thought, as she returned slowly to the drawing-room, which she found deserted. Hearing voices in the room beyond, which was the Rector's library, she entered it, and found the brother and sister together. They were standing in the window holding each other's hands, and looking out—at nothing.

Ferdinand turned on hearing Barbara approach. He was very pale, and his countenance shewed signs of suppressed emotion.

"My father comes back to-morrow," he said, "and we have agreed to say nothing to my mother until I have told him. But I must write to Gerald directly." And he threw himself into a chair with a kind of groan as he spoke.

"Let me write too," said Blanche. "Poor, poor Gerald, I am sure he is the most to be pitied. Yet, he little knows how wretched he has made us!"

"Yes, darling, you shall write, but go now, both of you, and leave me," said her brother. "I must be alone, and will find you upstairs when I have finished."

Blanche bent over him and kissed him, and Barbara pressed his hand as she passed him. Then putting her arm through Blanche's, she led her from the room, and told her of Rose Upton's death.

CHAPTER III.

LETHBRIDGE PARK was one of those pleasant country seats which scattered over England, make our island the wonder of the foreigner and the boast of every native John Bull; beautifying the landscape which meets the traveller's eye, as he is whirled past village and homestead, over hill and dale in the course of his day's journey. It was not what you would call a "fine place," for the house had been built and added to from time to time, more with a view to comfort than appearance, and with an indifference to rule which would have sent an architect of the present day, crazy. It was surrounded by a prettily wooded park of no great extent, but which the rustic population around, believed to be the grandest and largest in Queen Victoria's dominions.

Colonel Lethbridge, the proprietor of the estate, was a popular landlord, a conscientious magistrate, a hospitable neighbour, and as good a specimen of the "country squire" as you would find far or

near. His wife was, like himself, a member of one of the long-established county families, and was considered the “dearest old lady” by all who knew her ; she was so gentle and kind and pleasant in her ways to both high and low. They had one son and one daughter. Charles Lethbridge, the son, had just entered the “Guards,” and was an especial source of interest not unmixed with anxiety to all the mammas with marriageable daughters in the district. The daughter was an universal favourite. The mammas who took so lively an interest in her brother, were never tired of extolling Cissy Lethbridge’s accomplishments, and enlarging upon her other excellencies, always adding in an aside to their female offspring, “And you need never be afraid of her interfering with you, my dears, for she is so very plain.” And herein lay the secret of Cissy’s popularity. She was plain, but like many other persons who cannot be described as “good-looking,” she had so sweet an expression, and there was something so attractive about her manner and speech that it never occurred to you until you had left her, that she had really no pretensions whatever to beauty. This fact was at times the occasion of a pang to her fond mother, and a passing vexation to her brother ; but to Cissy herself it was a matter of no moment, and her father always declared he would not exchange his little pet for “the prettiest pink and white doll-faced Miss amongst them.”

He doted upon his daughter, and she returned his love with interest.

I have mentioned that hospitality was one of the Colonel's attributes, and there were few months in the year which did not find his house plentifully supplied with guests. In the shooting season there was always sure to be a pleasant party. Everyone liked staying with the Lethbridges, and invitations were sought by their London acquaintance with avidity. Towards the end of the season it was quite a common thing to hear, "Are you going to Lethbridge this autumn?" and Charles's brother officers were in the habit of reminding each other that it was "their turn now." During the September in question, when first we introduce the Colonel, his family and his mansion to our readers' notice, the usual party had not assembled however, for Mrs. Lethbridge and Cissy had bargained for a "little bit of Charley all to themselves;" and both the Colonel and his son were of opinion that the pheasant shooting a little later "would be better worth asking fellows for," and that they could do very well by themselves for the present. Consequently the only visitors in the house were a young married lady, who was a connection of the Lethbridges, and—as Cissy declared "they must have a gentleman for Madeline"—a Sir Edward Bateson, who was considered a sort of tame cat about the house, and who did as a 'gentleman for Mrs. Vernon' very well indeed.

Mrs. Vernon had her son with her, a boy of ten years old, and although he did not count as anyone, he was a very principal person in his own estimation. His mamma looked upon him as a sort of "chaperon."

"I can go anywhere with Cecil, you know," she was wont to say, and being satisfied as to his existence and well-doing, she did not trouble herself much more about him. With everyone else he was a great favourite. Cissy worshipped him. "There never was such a boy as Cecil," she declared, "never." Mrs. Lethbridge quite agreed with her, and the old Colonel never saw him without shaking his head solemnly, and assuring whoever was by, that "Vernon might be proud of that chap indeed!" Mrs. Vernon was often supposed by strangers to be a widow, but they generally discovered that she had a husband before they had been long in her society. The said husband happened to be in India. "Mamma would not hear of my going there," she was in the habit of saying, "and although it is wretched for me being all alone in England, Captain Vernon insisted upon my remaining behind, and I am obliged to make the best of it." She did make the "best of it," certainly, and managed to enjoy herself very tolerably in the absence of her lord and master.

Madeline Vernon was a little creature, but she somehow contrived to give herself an appearance of greater height than she possessed. She was

very much admired by men, and although ladies as a rule contended that "they could not see what there was so wonderful about her," there was no one whose dress and style they more eagerly copied than hers. She was always perfectly dressed. Wherever she went, "Mad Vernon," as Charley Lethbridge called her, was safe to be the best dressed person there. Her hair was very remarkable. She always wore it in the extremest fashion, and its golden shade was so striking that ill-natured people insinuated it was not its natural shade at all. Her eyes were large, dark, and well shaped, and her eyebrows, contrasting so forcibly as they did with the colour of her hair, attracted attention the moment you looked at her. Her nose was slightly *retroussé*, her complexion pale and clear. Altogether Mrs. Vernon was a person who obtained notice, and made a sensation in whatever circle she appeared.

The luncheon hour at Lethbridge Park was two o'clock; and the ladies had obeyed the summons of the loud sounding gong, which penetrated to all parts of the house, with alacrity. Sir Edward Bateson was nursing a sprained ankle, and had not accompanied the sportsmen who had taken their departure after breakfast, (the Colonel and Charles being joined by the Vicar's son,) he therefore followed the "rustling group" with the aid of a stick, and declared he was as hungry as a hawk, having done nothing for the last hour but yawn

and stretch his legs on a sofa in the library.

"Mrs. Vernon was so very unkind to me," he complained to Cissy, as he handed her some vegetables, "she beat me at billiards, and then would keep the book she knew I was reading, although I'm certain she finished it last night, and in short, I have had a wretched time of it I assure you."

"Poor man," said Cissy, smiling somewhat mischievously. "Is that true, Madeline? I shall not be able to leave you two alone together another day so confidingly as I did this morning, whilst I was teaching my little school girls and thinking you were entertaining each other so nicely."

"You never said you wanted the book, Sir Edward," observed Mrs. Vernon, "or I would not have taken it to my room, as I have not been reading at all, having had some letters I was obliged to write."

"That makes it still harder on poor Sir Edward," said Mrs. Lethbridge. "By the bye, Cissy," she added, turning to her daughter, "didn't Charley promise to be in for luncheon? I heard you speaking about it."

"Yes, mamma," answered Cissy, "I want him to ride with me to Wentmore this afternoon, and he said he would not forget."

"I am going to take you to see Lady Frances Lennox," continued Mrs. Lethbridge, addressing Madeline Vernon. "They were not at home when you were here last, and they are great friends of

ours. Lady Frances is one of the most charming people I know."

"And I am sure Blanche is one of the dearest girls," exclaimed Cissy. "I think she is perfect. She is so pretty and nice I always prescribe for myself a visit to Wentmore whenever I feel particularly cross or out of sorts, and the first sight of Blanche Lennox's face makes me all right again."

"I can't bear perfect people," remarked Mrs. Vernon. "I wonder if these Lennoxes are related to a Mr. Gerald Lennox I see in London sometimes. I remember his saying his belongings lived somewhere in this part of the world."

"The eldest son's name is Gerald," said Mrs. Lethbridge, "and he is a good deal in town I know. The young ladies look upon him as rather a *parti* I believe, as he has some independent property of his own, left him by an eccentric old godfather."

"Then it is the same I daresay," said Mrs. Vernon. "Is he likely to be down here, I wonder? I rather like meeting people I know in London, when I am in the country, one has something to talk about then, and really very often I don't know what to say to people who only care for the gossip of their own neighbourhood, and know as much about London as if they lived at the North Pole."

"I've met the Lennox you mean, once or twice," said Sir Edward, rather sulkily. "He

goes to balls and parties and all that sort of thing, in a regular steady set. I don't think much of him, the little I've seen of him."

"Then I don't think it can be the same," observed Cissy Lethbridge, quietly, "for everyone likes Gerald Lennox. At least, everyone whose liking is worth having," she added, *sotto voce*.

Mrs. Vernon smiled to herself. She was quite aware why poor Gerald was an object of dislike to Sir Edward, and she would have been disappointed if he had not shewn some impatience at her expressing any wish to see him again.

"Here comes Charley," exclaimed Cissy, as the door opened, and her brother appeared in his shooting attire accompanied by Master Cecil, who rushed up to Cissy's side the moment he entered the room.

"I met that young man in the hall," said Charles Lethbridge, as he approached the table, "and it seemed we were both bound in the same direction, though we are rather late in the field I expect. How d'ye do, Maddie?" he continued, sitting down by Mrs. Vernon's side, "this is our first meeting to-day, isn't it? What are you all going to do? Ciss carries me off to Wentmore this afternoon I believe. Pass me that dish will you, Bateson?" And he applied himself to his luncheon in earnest.

"We are all going to Wentmore," said Mrs. Lethbridge. "I am going to take Madeline and

Sir Edward in the carriage. Where did you leave your father, Charley? I hope he will not be late coming home?"

"He was going to lunch with old Stephens," answered her son. "They had some farming business to talk over, and young Lawrence and he were going in there when I came away. He won't be late to-day I know."

"Don't eat too much, Cecil," said Mrs. Vernon, rising from the table and bestowing a careless glance on her son and heir, who was doing ample justice to something good before him. Then turning to her hostess, she added, "I shall go and get ready, Mrs. Lethbridge; the carriage is ordered at three, I think you said?" And she moved towards the door, which Sir Edward hastened, as well as his lameness would allow, to hold open for her as she passed out.

"Do you know Gerald Lennox, Bateson?" asked young Lethbridge, as the Baronet returned to the table, and helped himself to another glass of wine.

"Oh! I just know him, that's all;" was the answer. "He isn't in my set at all. A Catholic or something of that sort isn't he?"

Cissy Lethbridge looked up quickly, as her mother was about to put in an indignant denial. "We are *all* Catholics, Sir Edward," said she, colouring and speaking very fast, "and I am sure

Gerald is not more likely to be a *Roman Catholic* than I am!"

Sir Edward stared, and Charles Lethbridge laughed. "Well done, Cissy," he cried, as he rose from the table. "Everyone knows you are an old Papist in disguise, so that isn't saying much for your friend, eh?"

"Charley, Charley, don't talk nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Lethbridge. "The Lennoxes are all very High Church, and perhaps the young ones go a little further than is desirable, but you should not joke about such a serious thing as anyone becoming a Papist. I believe a great deal we used to think very shocking in my young days, is found out to be quite right now, and the real doctrine of the Church of England; but however that may be, (and I'm sure I don't pretend to judge,) we know the Pope *must* be wrong, and therefore having anything to do with him is quite out of the question."

"Well, for my part, I stick up for the Pope," answered her son, kissing her as he spoke, "and the first time I have the chance, I intend to pay him my respects in the Eternal City itself. He's a rare good old fellow I believe. Lots of our men have been to Rome and say it's an awfully jolly place."

"You're a naughty, foolish, good-for-nothing boy," said Mrs. Lethbridge, smiling, and shaking her head at him. "It is of no use talking to

you, and if you are going to ride with your sister you had better go and make yourself presentable, as the horses will be round punctually at the hour."

The luncheon party then dispersed, and Charles Lethbridge, following his mother's advice, proceeded to equip himself for his ride. The horses had just been brought round when he descended into the hall some quarter of an hour later, and the carriage was coming up from the stables. It was a bright afternoon, everything seemed gay and smiling, the young man felt in high spirits, and fully disposed to enjoy his ride. Seldom could one meet with a better-looking or more engaging youth than was the heir of Lethbridge Park. He was not yet of age, although rapidly approaching that eventful epoch in his existence. Contact with his fellow men had not yet entirely rubbed off the freshness and ardour of boyhood, and he had none of the *mauvaise honte* which leads young men of his age so often to appear older than they are. His natural disposition was so good, that it was with no effort on his part that he won golden opinions on every side. Those of either sex to whom the only son of a wealthy landed proprietor was sufficiently endowed with attractions from that fact alone to render him an object of admiration and regard, were of course loud in his praise, and they were not the only ones who maintained that "Charley Lethbridge

was the best fellow in the world." With those amongst his acquaintance, whose good opinion was worth having, he was a favourite also. And he deserved to be so. A more warm-hearted, good-tempered young fellow it was not possible to meet with, and perhaps it was no detriment in the eyes of the fair sex that he was as handsome in appearance as he was agreeable and prepossessing in manners.

He was tall and well built. Fair curly locks clustered over his open forehead, and a soft moustache on his upper lip lent an air of manliness to his otherwise boyish face. His eyes were blue and laughing, his voice and his laugh had that unmistakable ring in them which springs only from a true and honest heart. If he looked well in his careless shooting dress, he appeared to still greater advantage in his present costume, and as he helped his sister to mount she thought that she might well be proud of her cavalier.

The equestrians preceded the carriage down the drive from the house to the pretty rustic lodge which stood by the gates, opening on to the Wentmore road, and then leaving it to follow at a more sober pace, they rode on in advance.

As the Lethbridge carriage drew up in front of Wentmore Rectory, its occupants noticed that the riders had not dismounted but were talking to Ferdinand Lennox who stood in the doorway,

and advanced towards Mrs. Lethbridge as the carriage stopped.

"I have just been saying," he began, after the usual salutations had been exchanged and he had been introduced to Mrs. Vernon and Sir Edward, "that my mother is very poorly, and I am afraid cannot see anyone to-day. She will be very sorry I know when she hears you have called. We are expecting my father home this evening. He has been staying with the Bishop. Blanche is out I think, but won't you come in for a few minutes and sit down?"

The young man spoke hurriedly and with an evident embarrassment in his manner. Mrs. Lethbridge remarked it, and was wondering as to its cause, when Cissy riding round to the other side of the carriage, exclaimed, "I'm sure Madeline would like to see the church, mamma! Had we not better dismount and walk there, and then the horses and carriage can wait for us in the village? Can we have the keys?" she added, addressing Ferdinand across the carriage.

"Yes, certainly," he answered. "I will get them and follow you directly if you will go down to the church."

Then desiring a servant to attend to the horses, he returned into the house. Cissy and her brother dismounted, and the latter opened the carriage door, and assisted Mrs. Vernon to alight saying as he did so in a low tone to his mother,

"They have had some bad news. Something about Gerald. I will tell you presently, and poor Lady Frances is dreadfully knocked up by it."

"Cissy seems so bent upon our seeing the church, I suppose it is something wonderful," said Mrs. Vernon, shaking out the folds of her dress as she stood in the carriage drive, and looking rather disappointed at the result of their expedition, as she had been rather curious to see Lady Frances and her daughter of whom she had heard so much. Then as the carriage slowly returned into the village, Cissy, Mrs. Vernon, Sir Edward, and Charles Lethbridge walked towards the church, and entered the churchyard by a little side gate which opened from the Rectory grounds.

"Isn't this pretty, Madeline?" exclaimed Cissy. "Did you ever see anything so well kept, or so nice as those baskets of flowers and the neatness of the graves? I always wish our churchyard was half as well attended to, but I despair of Mr. Lawrence ever doing anything."

"Yes, it is very nice," said Mrs. Vernon, with an air of indifference. "One does not often see so many flowers in a churchyard. I don't know that I quite like them, it makes it look too much like a garden. Is that the organ?" she added, as they drew nearer the building, from which proceeded the sounds of a richly toned instrument evidently touched by an experienced hand. "Who

can be playing? There is no service I hope?"

And she stopped rather in dismay.

"Don't be frightened," said Cissy, "it is only some one practising. Blanche Lennox plays the organ, I hope it is she."

As she spoke she entered the fine old edifice, which built many centuries before, had been recently restored by Mr. Lennox, and was a fine specimen of Early English. The noise made by their pushing open the side door which stood ajar, was not sufficient to disturb the player at the organ, who was concealed from sight by a curtain which hung in front of the seat, and the full tones of the instrument continued to peal through the building. The organ was placed at one end of the north aisle, and as the party of new comers advanced towards it, the little village boy who was acting as pumper, alarmed at the sight of so many strange faces, lost his presence of mind, and leaving his post, ran round in front to say, "Eer's some ladies coming, Miss," and before he could regain his corner, the sound had evaporated in a dismal groan which caused the performer to utter an exclamation of annoyance, and Cissy Lethbridge then perceived that it was not Blanche but Barbara Lennox who was practising at that hour, as was her wont.

Barbara instantly rose and came towards the visitors, saying, "I did not know anyone was in

the church ! How long have you been here, Miss Lethbridge ?”

“ Is that Miss Lennox ?” whispered Madeline Vernon to Charles Lethbridge, as they stood a little apart whilst Cissy and Barbara spoke to each other, and Sir Edward stared vacantly round the edifice.

“ No, she is a cousin,” answered Charles in the same tone. “ She is a very nice girl, but not like the other. Here comes Ferdinand,” he added, turning towards his sister, “ with the keys, which were not wanted after all.”

“ I did not know you were practising, Barbara,” said Ferdinand Lennox, as he approached, holding the ponderous keys of the church in his hand. “ Is it not a nice organ, Mrs. Vernon ? Do you play at all yourself ?”

“ No, I never attempted the organ,” replied Mrs. Vernon. “ Miss Lennox plays most beautifully. I am sure it must be very difficult.”

Cissy Lethbridge then proposed that they should go round the church, and examine the different points of interest and beauty it contained. Some of the stained glass in the windows was very fine, and Mrs. Vernon admired all she saw extremely. “ But it is very like a Catholic church, dear,” she said to Cissy, as they were standing a little apart from the others. “ Those candlesticks on the altar give it quite that sort of look.”

“ It *is* a Catholic church, of course,” returned

Cissy. "I suppose you mean it looks like a Roman Catholic one ; and if so, I don't agree with you, for I don't see anything which is inconsistent with an Anglican church about it."

"Oh ! I never understand you, you know, Cissy," was the hasty rejoinder. "Catholic or Roman Catholic seems to me the same thing. All I can say is, this does not look like a Protestant church, at least, not like those one is accustomed to."

"And it is not one," asserted Cissy, confidently. "So that is quite right. You are such a dreadful heretic, Madeline. Just ask Miss Seymour if she calls herself a Protestant!"

Further conversation was just then put a stop to by the approach of Sir Edward, who informed them that Mrs. Lethbridge was waiting and would be glad if they would come. Taking a final glance round the building which she had quite taste enough to appreciate and admire, Mrs. Vernon then accompanied Cissy and the Baronet down the steps which led from the entrance of the church to where the carriage stood. Mrs. Lethbridge who had remained in it waiting for them, as she had often seen Wentmore Church, was talking to Barbara and Ferdinand Lennox who stood by the carriage door. She looked up as they appeared, and said, "Now Madeline, dear, I am sorry to hurry you away, but I wish to call at

the Oaks on our way home. What do you think of the Church? Is it not beautiful?"

"Very nice indeed," was Mrs. Vernon's safe remark, as she took leave of the Lennoxes and seated herself by Mrs. Lethbridge's side.

"I have been so dreadfully shocked," said Mrs. Lethbridge, turning to her as they drove off, "by hearing that Mr. Gerald Lennox, the eldest son whom you said you knew, has really become a Roman Catholic. His poor brother seems very much cut up about it, and it must be a terrible blow to them all. Such an attached family as they are. I don't wonder at poor Lady Frances being quite ill."

Mrs. Vernon received the information very composedly, and Sir Edward remarked, "I thought he was one ever so long ago. I know he went to church every day and all that sort of thing, and when a man takes to that, I set it down he is going mad or over to Rome, one or the other. Just as if once a week wasn't enough for anybody. And too much too," he added, under his breath as he concluded.

But good Mrs. Lethbridge was very much discomposed, and could talk of nothing else but of those "Poor Lennoxes," ejaculating at intervals, "What will they do!" and "How very sad,—such a fine young man!" etc., etc., as they went along.

Arrived at the Oaks, which was a large well-built house, approached by a winding drive through

shrubberies, they were admitted into the presence of Mrs. Fraser Smith, who was seated in her drawing-room with her three elder daughters. Mrs. Lethbridge was too much occupied with what she had heard at Wentmore to keep it long to herself, and as she and Mrs. Smith placed themselves on a sofa a little apart from the others, she asked that lady in an anxious tone if she had seen anything of the Lennoxes lately. "They are in sad distress, poor things," she added, "but perhaps you have not heard?"

"We were there the day before yesterday," answered Mrs. Smith, "and I am sure nothing was the matter then. My daughters had a game of croquet with Blanche Lennox and two gentlemen we took over with us, and I thought Lady Frances and Blanche seemed both in very good spirits. It must be something very sudden, surely?"

"I am not sure that I ought to say anything about it," returned Mrs. Lethbridge, with some hesitation. "Poor Mr. Lennox himself doesn't know yet, as he is away from home. I could not have believed it, unless Ferdinand had told me himself."

"But what is it?" asked Mrs. Smith, her curiosity greatly aroused. "Nothing about the girls is it?"

Mrs. Lethbridge proceeded to reassure her on that point, and then with many injunctions as to

secrecy "until they tell you themselves, you know," informed her of Gerald's "sad fall," for so the good lady designated the step he had taken, and indeed in her innermost heart, she believed he could not have done much worse.

At the other end of the room, the eldest Miss Smith was conversing with Mrs. Vernon and Cissy on the subject of the late Archery Meeting and other deeply interesting matters, neither Cissy nor Madeline making any mention of what had transpired at Wentmore, the latter from sheer indifference on the subject, and the former because she felt too much for her friends at the Rectory, and was too much upset herself by what she had heard, to care to discuss the subject with Clara Smith. Bella Smith, the third daughter, and Charles Lethbridge, were looking over some drawings lately done by the young lady, and which he was expected duly to admire, whilst Laura monopolised Sir Edward in a window recess, and improved the acquaintance she had formed with him a few evenings before at the Archery ball.

The Smiths were all what is termed 'taking' girls, and Sir Edward thought he had often met with a less agreeable companion than the young lady who evidently wished to produce a pleasing impression upon him. The Baronet had a fair share of good looks, and when he chose to exert himself, could converse sensibly and fluently enough on most subjects, so that he appeared

to no little advantage in Miss Laura's eyes with whom his social status alone was sufficient to render him an object of interest and attention. Laura was a clever girl, and took advantage of the opportunity afforded her of drawing out Sir Edward, and making him appear to advantage in his own eyes. She soon found out which were his strong points and which were not, and by dint of enlarging on some topics and avoiding others, she contrived in a very short space of time, to convince Sir Edward that he was a much sharper fellow than he had been aware of himself, and that she, Laura Smith, was 'no end' of a fine girl, and the pleasantest he had met with for a long time.

Whether Mrs. Vernon divined something of what was passing in his mind, and considered it time to interfere, or whether she was weary of remarking on the shapes of peoples' bonnets, and listening to comments upon persons Clara and Cissy were acquainted with, but of whom, she, Madeline Vernon, knew nothing and cared less, certain it is that Sir Edward and Laura were interrupted in a most interesting discussion with regard to the respective merits of London and the country as places of residence, by her seizing a book of photographs from a table, and appealing to Laura to tell her who the people were whose likenesses it contained, and the *tête à tête* was effectually broken up in consequence.

Rather ungraciously at first, although she soon recovered her usual composure, Laura proceeded to enumerate "Mr. This" and "Miss That" in the usual style, with the prefix, "I don't suppose you would know her," or "Perhaps you have met him in society?" when a voice interrupted her with—

"Oh! don't show that book, Laura, there is such a horrid thing of me in it!"

Laura turned hastily round, exclaiming,

"Minnie! When did you come in?"

"I was in the garden and did not know there were visitors, and you were all so busy talking when I opened the door, you did not hear me," answered Minnie, with a merry laugh. Then, having shaken hands with the others, she crossed over the room towards Mrs. Lethbridge, and waited until an opportunity offered for speaking to her, seating herself, meanwhile, on a low couch near that lady and her mother, who were still discussing the event which had taken place in the Lennox family.

It was now getting late, and Charles Lethbridge told Cissy they must be going, and he thought as his mother did not seem inclined to move, that they had better start off first. Mrs. Lethbridge hearing this, said goodbyc to Mrs. Smith, begging her most earnestly not to "repeat for the present" what she had told her. Then rising from her seat, she uttered an exclamation of alarm which drew the attention of all present.

"Why! what is this?" she cried. "Someone is ill! Who is it? What can it be?" For in turning round to gather up her shawl, she had caught sight of some one apparently insensible lying on the ground near the sofa on which she had been seated.

"It is Minnie!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once.

In another moment the inanimate form of the young girl was raised, and Charles Lethbridge's strong arm had conveyed her to an open window, near which he supported her, whilst the others supplied restoratives and gradually brought the colour back to her cheeks. Then she slowly opened her eyes and looked up at her mother, who was bending over her in the greatest consternation.

"Minnie! my dearest, what is it?" cried she, as she met her daughter's anxious wandering gaze.

"Send them away, mamma," murmured Minnie.
"It is nothing, I shall be well directly!"

No one caught the words but Mrs. Smith, who, turning towards her visitors, begged they would no longer distress themselves on her daughter's account. "She will be quite well directly. A little over-tired, that is all." And with many expressions of regret and sympathy the Lethbridge party took their leave.

"Could she have heard anything I was saying

to her mother?" thought Mrs. Lethbridge, as she leaned back in the carriage, and meditated on her way home. "And yet, if so, why should that have affected her so deeply? unless—" but here her cogitations were interrupted by Mrs. Vernon, who made some remark which led into a conversation which continued until they arrived at Lethbridge.

CHAPTER IV.

MINNIE SMITH was a fair-haired girl, with soft hazel eyes and a pretty pouting mouth which looked as if made to be kissed. She was generally considered a "nice good-natured little thing," spoiled by her mother, and petted by her sisters. By her young lady friends in the neighbourhood, she had been pronounced "rather a flirt," since she had come out, that is to say, since she had been in the habit of going to Balls and parties with the rest of the family, but as she was the youngest and "hardly grown up yet," (as her eldest sister took occasional opportunities of hinting,) this had not been for very long.

Minnie was not what is called "sentimental," nor was she, as a rule, given to fainting or exhibitions of that kind under slight provocation. She enjoyed life as much as anyone, and took things very much as she found them. She was not in ill health, neither was she more than usually foolish or affected. What then was the cause of her sud-

den indisposition on the occasion of Mrs. Lethbridge's visit to the Oaks as mentioned in our last chapter ?

It was this.

Minnie had a heart, and that heart had been given wholly, entirely, and (as she believed,) irrevocably, to a young gentleman of her acquaintance, whose name was Gerald Lennox, although in justice to him it must be stated that he had no suspicion of anything of the sort. Catching his name as she sat near her mother and Mrs. Lethbridge, she naturally gave more attention to their half-whispered conversation than she would otherwise have done, and in a very few moments she had heard enough to make her pulsation cease, and the room swim round her. She knew that he, Gerald Lennox, had become a Roman Catholic, and knowing that, felt that for her there was, (at least, so it seemed for the moment,) no more joy or peace or satisfaction in life. All seemed confused around her, and she fell forward from her seat in a swoon, as we have described.

Was Minnie then so stern a Protestant, that the discovery of Gerald's having become a Papist was too much for her, and could in itself produce so strange an effect upon her nerves ? Nothing of the sort. Minnie had been too much under the influence, latterly, of Cissy Lethbridge and Blanche Lennox to have any feeling of that kind, indeed, she scorned and repudiated the name of Protes-

tant, and believed as devoutly in Seven Sacra-
ments, the Real Presence and Priestly Absolution
as the Pope himself—what could it be then ?

We will explain.

Minnie and her sisters had all been brought up to consider that matrimony was the grand aim and object of existence, and that a “good catch” was the one thing to be desired and sought for. Mrs. Fraser Smith was ambitious, and instilled into her daughters as much as possible the duty of rising in the world, by means of some noble or wealthy alliance. Mr. Fraser Smith was, however, less aspiring in his views, and always told his children they might please themselves as to whom they should marry, provided “the fellow was of the right sort, you know, and no humbug about him,” and all, he, Mr. Fraser Smith, could say, was, that if they were content to live on small incomes, he should never object, fixing however, the sum of six hundred per annum as the lowest on which any decent couple could live. “And that need not frighten you, girls,” he would add, “because, if you choose to marry a man with only three hundred a year of his own, and there is nothing else to be said against him, I will give him another three, and so make up the requisite figure, and whatever any fellow has, who comes to ask me for one of you, always supposing it is three hundred a year or upwards, I will double it ; so now you know. And if you want five thousand

a year, you must look out for someone with twenty-five hundred. But seriously, if you take my advice, you won't think of settling down under one thousand a year, as that is the minimum in my opinion, required for respectability and comfort."

Alas, for the many, then, who in Mr. Fraser Smith's estimation were neither comfortable nor respectable !

Now, Gerald Lennox had a thousand a year of his own, and nothing doubting in her own mind that he would sooner or later change the 'brother and sister' style of familiarity which existed between the younger members of the two families for some feeling of a warmer nature, as regarded herself, Minnie had secretly contemplated with much satisfaction, the certainty of there being no opposition on her father's part to any matrimonial engagement between them. Of course, the connection in itself would be an object with both Mr. and Mrs. Smith, for no family in the county was more highly thought of than the Lennoxes, it being well known that the Rector of Wentmore was a member of one of the oldest families in England, although properly belonging to another county than that in which his friendship with the Bishop of —— had placed him, and the fact moreover, that Gerald Lennox was the nephew of a Peer, did not in any way injure him in the estimation of his acquaintance in general. Up to this

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fatal moment, then, in which poor Minnie had heard of his secession from the Church of England, she had been living on hope, and the buoyancy of her nature had made all seem bright and cheerful before her. Nor would, under ordinary circumstances, the fact of Gerald's having become a Roman Catholic have made any real difference to her in any way; but in a moment of brotherly confidence, he had himself told her that this property which had been left him by his godfather, old Sir Gerald Newcome, was his, only so long as he remained a Protestant, "which means, as long as I am a member of the Church of England," he explained, repudiating, as he did most entirely, the idea of his being a Protestant in any sense whatever, and, of course, if the Established Church of England is not, and never was, Protestant, he was right, but on that point persons have, and always will have, their own opinion.

He must, then, by this rash act of his, have become penniless, or at least entirely dependent on his father, and in the ruin which spread itself before her mind's eye, Minnie's own prospects of future happiness seemed too surely wrecked as well. That was the reason of her being so utterly overcome by the intelligence, and her only consolation was, that no one for a moment suspected the cause of her emotion, and she therefore escaped expressions of pity and condolence which

would have been harder to bear than anything else.

All that evening, Minnie remained on a sofa in a dark corner of the room, silent and unhappy, pleading a bad headache as an excuse for not coming forward and taking her usual place in the family circle. Her sisters had been much surprised at the sudden attack which thus silenced and subdued the usually merry and talkative pet of the family, but in compliance with her own earnest entreaty, they left her to herself, and she thankfully profited by their indulgence to nurse her grief in silence. During the night she lay restless and wakeful, and the next morning was so far from well, that she could not go down to breakfast, although she got up and dressed, but preferred remaining on the sofa in her own little room, where her mother and sisters visited her in turn.

"I shall send for Mr. Findlay, dear," said Mrs. Smith, determinedly, "if you are not much better this afternoon. Your hands are feverish and hot, and I am sure he ought to see you. Don't talk too much, and keep quiet. You have some nice books I see. That croquet playing after the ball was too much for you I know."

To be left quiet was all poor Minnie wanted, and she begged earnestly that the doctor might not be summoned. "I will go and sit out in the garden this afternoon," she said, "and the air

will do me good, there is nothing the matter really."

In the afternoon accordingly, she had a seat placed for her in a shady part of the garden, which commanded the approach to the house. Her mother and sisters set off on an expedition to the neighbouring town, and she was left in undisturbed possession of the place. If anyone had come upon this young creature suddenly, as she sat there, they must have been struck by the palleness of her cheek, and the air of depression and sadness which pervaded her. And some one who drew near the house by the drive from the gate opening on to the road, did notice her, and was struck in this way by her appearance.

"Miss Minnie, is that you?" exclaimed a voice, which caused Minnie to look up hastily, and utter an exclamation of surprise, "and all alone? Dear me! I was afraid you would all be out this nice day, and am glad to find you at home, but my dear, you do not look well, is anything the matter? And your mamma and sisters? Gone out are they? and you are all alone! dear, dear."

The speaker was a female of uncertain age, and of somewhat eccentric appearance. A feeling of annoyance came over Minnie Smith, as she recognised her on her approach, but ere she had finished speaking, a smile came across her face, and she begged Miss Jones to fetch herself a chair from inside the house and sit down by her, as everyone

else was out, and she should be glad of a little company. "My head has been very bad all the morning," she added, "but the air does it good, and so I am sure you will excuse my coming in with you."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly. I shall be delighted to sit with you, if you will let me. I am rather tired with my walk, and it is a long time since I have had a chat with you, dear, dear!" was the answer, and Miss Jones disappeared into the house, quickly returning with a chair which she placed beside Minnie's, and then having seated herself she turned round and surveyed the young lady scrutinisingly, shaking her head when she had finished her inspection, and telling her "she did look bad, dear, dear!"

Miss Jones, as we have hinted, was not an ordinary looking person by any means. Her age might have been anything between forty and sixty. The style of her dress was bordering on the juvenile, but her features did not carry out the impression of youth, which at first sight was conveyed by her appearance to the beholder. She wore a small hat on the top of her head, serving to display a great deal of rich black hair, which fell in ringlets over her shoulders, and gave her a school-girlish look at first glance. A white veil of figured net partially concealed her features from view, but the colour on her cheeks was very discernible, and seemed almost too bright to be

natural. Her eyes were dark and piercing, her nose was long, her features sharp. Her figure was very slim, and she moved as actively as a girl of sixteen. Her voice was thin and pitched in a high key, and almost every time she spoke she ended her remarks with the exclamation, "dear, dear!" which made people think she was a little cracky.

She was a maiden lady, of small but independent means. She lived in a cottage near Wentmore. She knew everyone, but only a few knew much about her. With the neighbouring families she was friendly and sociable, and as far as her means would allow, she was charitable to the poor, and was looked upon by them with grateful feelings in return. Her father, it was understood, had been a naval officer, and she was generally supposed to have been, at one time, 'very well off,' as the saying is. But times had changed with her in more ways than one, and in spite of her efforts to conceal the fact, she was, alas, no longer so young as she had been. It was not often that she visited the Oaks, the elder daughters and their mamma not understanding or making much allowance for her odd ways, and she felt rather shy of them, but Minnie was a favourite, and she was particularly glad to find her alone on this occasion.

" You have been doing too much lately, my dear," said Miss Jones. " I heard of you all at

the Archery meeting, and you have been having company since, have you not? Miss Barbara Lennox told me you had been over to the Rectory quite a large party the other day. But you are not strong, my dear, and must be careful. I am older than you, my dear," and Miss Jones's voice became impressive as if she felt that Minnie might naturally question the fact, "and you must let me give you a little of my own experience, dear, dear!"

"Have you been at the Rectory lately? Have you seen Blanche Lennox the last day or two, Miss Jones?" enquired Minnie. "Mrs. Lethbridge was here yesterday, and I fancied from what she said that they had had some bad news or something of the kind, but am not sure."

Minnie tried to steady her voice as she asked the question, but did not quite succeed, and Miss Jones looked at her rather fixedly as she replied, "I am afraid there is something wrong, my dear, at least something distressing has happened, for I saw Mr. Ferdinand for a few minutes yesterday, and he said as much."

"Something about — about Gerald do you mean?" said Minnie, looking up into the other's face as she bent over her.

To her surprise, Miss Jones stooped forward and kissed her forehead without speaking.

The colour flew to Minnie's face, and her eyes fell as she said, nervously,

"I mean, do you think he is ill? Is there

anything—" and she stopped confusedly, for Miss Jones continued to regard her with penetrating eyes.

Miss Jones did not answer, nor did she remove her gaze for a few moments. Then suddenly she started back, and put her handkerchief to her face whilst what sounded like half a cough and half a sob escaped her.

"He is quite well," she said presently, and Minnie who had been gazing at her with astonishment, thought her voice sounded harsh and strange, "but he is not likely to be at home just yet. I think,—I am afraid he is in some trouble."

"Miss Jones, tell me. Is it true he has become a Roman Catholic?" cried Minnie, leaning forward and seizing the other's hand. "I am sure you know. Is it—is it true?"

"I believe it is," replied Miss Jones, and she laid her hand on the young girl's outstretched arm as she spoke. "I believe it is, and I need not tell you what that involves in his case."

Minnie turned away her head with a sort of stifled groan. "I know, I know," she murmured faintly. "Poor Lady Frances, and poor Blanche! how much they will feel it!"

"Noble! fine-hearted fellow! I shall never forgive his father if he turns away from him now. But it must be very sad for them all, dear, dear!" And Miss Jones relapsed into her usual nervous manner, and suddenly discovering that her parasol

had become unfastened, busied herself in rolling it tightly up and fastening the button again.

"Miss Jones, will you take a note for me to Wentmore?" said Minnie, starting up. "It will be very kind of you, and I shall not be a moment writing it."

"Certainly, certainly, my dear," answered Miss Jones. "But you must not go into the house. Cannot I bring you your writing things out here? Ah! young people will be young people! dear, dear!" And Miss Jones forgot that she was so very little older than Minnie, as she watched her flitting rapidly across the lawn and disappearing into the house beyond. Then taking up the book which Minnie had let fall, she seated herself again on the chair from which she had risen and amused herself with turning over its pages until the young lady returned with a little note which she put into Miss Jones's hand, saying,

"You will give this to Hester Seymour for me?"

"I will;" was the answer. "I declare the colour has quite come back into your cheeks, dear Miss Minnie! But I am sure your mamma will scold very much if she finds you have not been sitting here quietly during her absence, and I am afraid she will think it is my fault, dear, dear!"

Minnie shook her head and smiled, and shortly after Miss Jones took leave, and she and the note were on their way to Wentmore.

The following evening when the servant was

closing the shutters in Mrs. Gregory's drawing-room, and the tea urn was hissing on the table, as that lady and her niece usually dined early; and when they were alone did not move into the dining-room for their six o'clock repast, a ring was heard at the door bell. Having left the room, the footman returned in a few minutes, and announced, "Miss Smith," throwing open the door and admitting Minnie at the same time, who advanced smilingly as the two ladies rose to receive her.

"It is so good of you to have me, dear Mrs. Gregory," she said, embracing the aunt, and then turning to bestow a sisterly kiss upon the niece, she added, "It was all I could do to get them to let me come, but Mr. Findlay was an old dear, and said it would do me good, and so, after that, mamma couldn't help herself, you know."

Mrs. Gregory was very fond of young people, and Minnie's cheerful ways and manner made her a favourite with the old lady. Her own niece, "Although the best and dearest girl in the world," she always said, was just a little too quiet perhaps, and any addition to their small circle was always most eagerly and gladly welcomed by her.

"I have asked Mr. Woods to look in bye-and-bye," said Mrs. Gregory, smiling, as they seated themselves round the tea table, "and I have no doubt he will do so, if he has finished preparing his sermon for to-morrow. I told him a young

lady was coming, and that I must have a nice young gentleman to meet her, and he is a nice young man is he not, my dear?"

But Minnie's face clouded over slightly at this intelligence, and without noticing the query, she turned to Hester, saying, "I was in hopes I should have had you all to myself, I have so many things I wanted to speak to you about. But I daresay we shall have time for that," she added, observing Hester's look of perplexity, as she glanced towards her aunt, that lady never supposing that any other arrangement could be more agreeable to her guests than such as she at any time proposed.

During the course of the meal, when Mrs. Gregory's attention was occupied by re-filling the cups, Minnie whispered to Hester, "I want to speak to you about the Lennoxes. Have you seen them to-day?"

Hester whispered back, "Yes. Mr. Lennox has come home." And then had to receive her tea from her aunt, and pass some cake in return.

The cloth was being removed, when a ring was heard at the bell. "There is Mr. Woods," said Mrs. Gregory, "although I hardly expected him so soon."

But two minutes after, when the door opened, it was Ferdinand Lennox who entered.

"Forgive me for intruding, dear Mrs. Gregory," he said, advancing towards her. "I see I am

just too late for tea, and you have company too. How do you do, Miss Minnie?" and having shaken hands with the old lady, he turned first to one young lady and then to the other.

"Do have a cup of tea, Mr. Ferdinand," exclaimed Mrs. Gregory, on hospitable thoughts intent. "You dine late I know, but we have only just done, and it can be brought back directly."

"No, indeed, thanks," answered Ferdinand, seating himself by Hester Seymour. "I only came in for a moment with a message from Blanche, and I rather thought I should see Woods here, as he told me you had asked him this evening. But he was going to dine with Mr. Hatchard, I know, and I suppose he has not been able to get away as yet."

"Mr. Lennox has returned, has he not?" enquired Mrs. Gregory. "I hope he is well, and Lady Frances better this evening? I was truly grieved to hear so poor an account of her, yesterday."

"My mother is a little better, thank you," answered Ferdinand, rather shortly. "My father came back yesterday, a day later than we had expected, but there was a great gathering of Rural Deans at the Palace, and he could not get away sooner. Blanche would be very glad if you could come up to-morrow, after service," he continued, turning to Hester, "as she wishes to arrange

something with you about that girl, Upton, I believe. The sister is to be buried on Monday."

"Give her my love, and say, I will come with pleasure," returned Hester. "How is Blanche this evening?" she added in a low tone.

"Better, but very sad, poor child. She wants you to comfort her. Bibi is so bitter on the subject, I cannot understand her, and Blanche is not able to discuss the question of right and wrong yet. We both feel so very much for him, poor fellow."

Ferdinand Lennox did not speak loud enough for any but Hester to hear what he said. She pressed his hand silently in answer.

Then rising, he took leave of Mrs. Gregory, and saying to Hester, "I shall tell Blanche you will come," he shook hands with her and Minnie, and departed.

In the hall he encountered Mr. Woods, who had just been admitted by the servant.

"I was wishing to see you," Ferdinand exclaimed, "but will not detain you now, if I may come down to-morrow afternoon. Shall you be at home at three o'clock?"

The curate assured him he should be at home at that hour, and Ferdinand then hurried away, whilst Mr. Woods passed on into the presence of the ladies.

"I knew you were dining with the old doctor," said Mrs. Gregory, when the mutual greetings

were over, "and was afraid he would have kept you till later. You did not sit very long over your wine?"

"No. The doctor was called away by a note from Mr. Findlay, asking him to attend a case he was unable to look after himself, at some little distance, and he was obliged to hurry off."

The curate and Mrs. Gregory then began a long discussion about the Clothing Club and other parish matters, in which the old lady was interested, and Minnie took advantage of the opportunity to carry off Hester into a corner of the room, and beg her to tell her all she knew or had heard about Gerald Lennox and how Lady Frances was,—what Mr. Lennox said, etc.

"I know very little more than the fact," said Hester, in reply to her numerous questions. "I haven't seen dear Blanche since the evening I met her in one of the poor cottages here, where she was visiting a young person who was very ill. I believe it was the very evening they heard the news. Indeed, Barbara told me afterwards that it was that day when she was with us for a short time, that she got the letter addressed to Ferdinand, but to be opened by her in case of his absence. He came back the next day, and they had determined not to tell Lady Frances anything till Mr. Lennox returned home, but she found out by their manner that something was wrong, and insisted upon knowing what it was."

"Mrs. Lethbridge said she was very poorly when she called at our house. Poor Lady Frances! But Hester, do you know anything about Gerald himself? Have they said anything about his losing his property? Because, you know, at least I always understood that if he left the Church of England—" and here Minnie stopped speaking, but her eyes looking into Hester's finished the sentence for her.

"Yes, yes, I know," answered Hester, "that is to say, he might have left the Church of England twenty times over if he had liked, and become a Presbyterian, a Wesleyan or an Anabaptist; but if he *joined* the *Church of Rome*, then old Sir Gerald willed that he should forfeit everything. I remember hearing all about it at the time. Gerald made no secret of it himself, but he always laughed and told Ferdinand *he* would never get it if it depended on his (Gerald's) turning Schismatic, as he intended to live and die a Catholic, and if he left the only Church which *was* Catholic in this country, why, he should cease to be one, so it was not likely he should do that!"

"And now he has done it!" And Minnie heaved a quiet sigh as she spoke.

"You two young ladies seem to have a great deal to say to each other," cried Mrs. Gregory, from the other end of the room. "Mr. Woods and I have finished our discussions, and now we

should like a little music. Hester, my dear, open the piano." And as Hester moved off towards the instrument, in compliance with her aunt's request, Mr. Woods came up to Minnie, and began the regulation enquiries concerning Mr. and Mrs. Smith and all the family, so there was no chance of any more private conversation between the young friends that evening.

Shortly afterwards, the "carriage for Miss Smith" was announced, and Minnie took leave, thanking Mrs. Gregory for a very pleasant evening, and telling Hester as she stood with her for a moment in the hall, that she should probably see her on Monday morning, as she was coming over to ask for a lesson on the organ from Barbara Lennox. Then she threw herself back in her father's carriage, and shutting her eyes, gave herself up to be entirely and delightfully wretched as it rolled home to the Oaks.

On the Monday morning, as Barbara Lennox was entering the Rectory gate on her return from a shopping expedition into the village, she heard some one calling after her, "Miss Barbara, I beg your pardon, dear, dear!" and looking back, she perceived Miss Jones hastening towards her from the direction of the church-yard.

"One moment, pray," continued that lady in rather a breathless condition. "Two of the Miss Smiths are in the church, wishing to speak to you. Miss Minnie has come over to practise, I think

she said, although I am sure she ought not to have walked so far, not being very strong, dear, dear!"

"Oh!" said Barbara, stopping, and not looking very much pleased. "In the church are they? Will you tell them I will come directly, only I must go in for a moment first."

"I will," answered Miss Jones, and she retraced her steps towards the church, wondering as she did so what it was about Barbara Lennox that made her always feel shy when she spoke to her, and a sort of relief when they had parted. She found Clara and Minnie Smith loitering about in the church-yard. Minnie had intended going straight to the Rectory, but this her elder sister had prevented. Miss Jones had met them on their way from the Oaks, and having seen Barbara in the village, she knew she was not at home. "There is no use in going to the house to ask for her," Clara had maintained, "we can go into the church and send for the key of the organ, and if she hears you playing, she will most likely come in."

But as Minnie's chief object in coming over was to see one of the Lennox party, this did not suit her views, and she probably would have carried her point when Miss Jones espied Barbara again in the distance, and volunteered to catch her ere she should have reached home, which accordingly she did as we have seen.

Barbara did not keep them long waiting, and they were soon grouped round the organ, listening to one of Mozart's Glorias, which she played at their express desire. This over, Clara Smith remembered a visit she had to pay in the village, and departed with Miss Jones, promising to return for Minnie in half an hour.

No sooner were they gone than Minnie begged she might go for a moment into the vestry to examine a stole, the embroidery of which she wanted to copy for one she was making Mr. Lawrence of Lethbridge, "Although he will never wear it I believe," she said, as Barbara led the way, and she followed into the small chamber on the north side of the chancel, sacred to clerical vestments and register chests. But once there, and beyond the hearing of the juvenile "pumper" at the organ, she seized Barbara by the hand, saying, "Do tell me how dear Blanche is this morning? Oh! I can't say how I have felt for you all—and for him."

"For Gerald, do you mean?" asked Barbara, somewhat coldly. "Oh! I don't think *he* needs much pity. Blanche is very unhappy, as we all are."

"But," continued Minnie, "one can't help, you know, admiring him for giving up everything for what he thinks right, even if we do not agree with him: and of course now it all goes to Ferdinand?"

"It—what?" asked Barbara, in a tone of surprise.

"Why, the property left him by his godfather, on the sole condition of his remaining a Protestant," answered Minnie.

"Ah!" cried Barbara, starting, "I forgot! and that all goes to Ferdinand now,—so it does. This is the stole you wished to look at, is it not?" she added, with her wonted composure, and notwithstanding various efforts on her part, Minnie could not get Barbara to enter again upon the question which alone had any real interest for her just then.

CHAPTER V.

"DUKE STREET, St. James's, I forget the number, but will stop you."

The speaker was a young man who was getting into a Hansom cab at the Fleet street end of Chancery Lane, and the person he addressed was the driver of the said cab, who having ascertained through his window of observation in the roof that his "fare" was seated, whipped up his horse, and drove off in the direction indicated.

Arrived at the corner of the street, the cab was stopped by its occupant, who, jumping out, dismissed it, and making straight for a small tailor's shop on one side of the way, rang at the private door.

"Mr. Lennox is at home?" he enquired, as it opened, and hardly waiting for the servant's answer, he brushed by her, ran up the stairs two steps at a time, and opened the door of a sitting-room on the first floor, exclaiming, "All right! I just managed to catch him, and he says he will

do as you wish, but is quite sure they won't suffer it, and I agree with him."

The apartment into which he thus unceremoniously introduced himself, was of the ordinary lodging-house description. The half-shabby furniture, the muslin window curtains which looked as if it was some time since they had been washed, the engravings on the walls, the one easy chair and the half dozen uneasy ones, the round table in the middle of the room, and the inevitable glass chiffonier at one end, forming the exact counterpart of every other "First floor front" in the neighbourhood which abounds in Furnished Apartments for Single Gentlemen, as announced by the neatly printed cards in the lower windows of the various houses. But, although the general air of the room was familiar enough to the habitué of London lodgings, there were some features in it which made it unlike the usual bachelor's den in many respects. There was all the appearance of its occupant having only recently entered into possession. A large number of books lay on the table, and were piled in heaps on the floor. Through the open door which led into the sleeping room beyond, various portmanteaus and packing cases could be seen, only partly relieved of their contents. On the table, writing materials of handsome and massive description were placed, and on the chimney-piece, amidst the china vases and other lodging-house ornaments, stood con-

spicuous, a large and beautifully carved crucifix.

The sole occupant of the room was a young man of about five-and-twenty years of age, who was seated at the table, engaged in writing as the door opened. He looked up as the new comer entered, and on hearing his announcement, cried, "A thousand thanks, my dear fellow, I am so much obliged to you. Sit down one moment whilst I finish this," and again resumed the pen which he had laid down. The other threw himself into the arm chair, and took up a book to amuse himself, but his attention wandered considerably from its pages, and he glanced from time to time at the writer near him, and at the various objects the room contained, as if his thoughts were occupied otherwise than by the work which he held in his hands.

And who were these two young men? The one was Gerald Lennox, of whom the reader has already heard, and the other was his cousin, Sidney Graham. The former, as we know, had recently become a Roman Catholic, and by so doing, had forfeited his title to a property which had rendered him since his majority, independent of his father, and free to follow the bent of his own devices. He had gone to Oxford with the idea of taking Anglican Orders, but when the living which had been promised him by his uncle, Lord Norwood, had no longer become the desideratum, it had at first appeared, by reason

of Sir Gerald Newcome's bequest, he deferred his intention of becoming a clergyman for a time, and the attractions and amusements of a London life upon which he at once entered, gradually induced him to abandon the idea altogether.

Having imbibed very High Church notions, whilst at a private tutor's, before going to the University, he there became mixed up with a very "advanced" set, and the friendships then formed, together with the strong religious bias which his home education had given him, preserved him from many of the snares and temptations to which a young man with a little money of his own, highly connected, of prepossessing appearance, and liked by all who knew him would have been otherwise exposed. Nevertheless Gerald Lennox was of too impulsive a nature, and too ready to believe in the trustworthiness of others, not to get into many scrapes which one of a less generous and more cautious disposition would have avoided. Neither selfish nor extravagant in his own person, he was so constantly giving to and helping others, that very often his father and his uncle had to come forward and help him out of the difficulties in which his thoughtlessness had involved him. With his godfather, Sir Gerald, he had always been a great favourite, and the old gentleman's one anxiety respecting him was the strong bias towards "Puseyism," and all that "tom foolery," as the worthy Baronet phrased it, which of late

years young Lennox had manifested. "As long as he remains a Protestant and sticks to the Church of England, I don't mind," he would say, "but if ever he becomes a Papist, and I can't see that he is much short of one even now—then, every penny I leave him shall go to his brother Ferdinand, for I'm determined those priests shan't get hold of any of *my* money." In vain Gerald would assure the old man that he was *not* a "Protestant," and that the best reason for his not joining the Church of Rome was, that he belonged to the only Catholic Church in the kingdom; viz., the Church of England. He turned a deaf ear to all such reasonings and explanations. "I don't care what you *call* yourself," he would say. "If you belong to the Established Church, which in my opinion is the only Church for any respectable man to belong to, you *are* a Protestant, my boy, and all this nonsense about calling yourself a Catholic and behaving as much like one as possible, you will grow out of in time, and if not—why—you know the consequences."

And knowing the consequences, Gerald Lennox had deliberately left the communion of the Established Church, and submitted himself to the Church of Rome. Whilst still finishing the letter upon which he was engaged when Sidney Graham entered the room, we will describe Gerald's personal appearance for the benefit of the reader.

The eldest son of the Rector of Wentmore was

one of those men who once seen was not easily forgotten. When he appeared in a London drawing-room, ladies who did not know him would ask each other "who that distinguished looking creature was?" and the men, whether of his own "set" or not, invariably shook hands and "how d'ye do'd" him when other acquaintances would hardly obtain from them a nod. He was tall, and well but slightly made. He had deep blue eyes and dark brown hair. The habitual expression of his countenance was a thoughtful gravity which at times approached to melancholy, but this was only in private or with one or two companions at the most. In general society he was lively and gay, and few men could converse more readily and pleasantly on all subjects than he could. He was not what is popularly termed a "lady's man" by any means. He neither sang nor played, nor was he given to five o'clock teas or such like weaknesses, so much favoured by the fairer sex. He had the *entrée* to all the best London houses, and being an excellent dancer, there were but few balls in the season for which he did not receive a card. But of late, Gerald had not been seen so frequently at these gay assemblies as of old, and many were the speculations and surmises as to the cause of his absence. "He is going to be married," said one. "No, he is going to become a Catholic and turn monk," said another. "As for that," a third would ex-

claim, "he has been 'all but' one so long, that I can't see why that should make any difference to him." Some few amongst his more intimate associates knew that he was a good deal out of town, it was supposed either visiting his father or at Brighton, where he often remained for a fortnight or so at a time, to get himself "put to rights" as he phrased it, when at all out of sorts either in mind or body. But the one who knew most about him and his movements was his cousin, Sidney Graham, and of him we will now say a few words.

Mr. Lennox of Wentmore had had an only sister who married young and not very happily. Her husband, who had retired from the East India Company's Civil Service, was of good family, possessed a considerable estate, and had a certain standing in his county, but his temper was said not to be of the best, and Alice Graham, it was imagined after marriage, often wished herself Alice Lennox again. Whether this were so or not, certain it is that the young wife's health and spirits gradually failed, and before the age of thirty she left her husband a widower with an only child, a son. Young Sidney, after passing from Eton to the University, had chosen the Bar as his profession, and being established in London had naturally come often in contact with his cousin, Gerald Lennox. Not that he had sought the latter out of his own accord, but Gerald's natural warmth of

disposition and kindness of heart had made it impossible for him to know that so near a relative was within reach, without endeavouring to cultivate his acquaintance as much as possible. No two men could differ more completely both as to character and ideas, but young Graham had been an old man almost before he was a young one, and was not at all the person to let go an advantage of any sort, which might be thrown in his way. And to him it was an advantage to be seen on an intimate and brotherly footing with the elegant and popular Gerald Lennox, whose nod or passing recognition was thought much of by many, for his cousin moved in a circle, which but for his friendship with him, Sidney Graham would have found it difficult to enter. Cold-hearted and calculating, had his kinsman been differently circumstanced and in need of *his* countenance in any way, Graham would probably have taken no notice of him whatever, but as it was, he gradually became more and more Gerald's friend and confidant, and Gerald believed him to be the 'best fellow in the world,' and at length could do nothing without him.

It is strange how blind we often are, how rash, and how wanting in prudence and forethought in our own concerns. If any friend of his, had shewn himself disposed to lean unreservedly upon a man of Graham's stamp, Gerald would have been the first to dissuade, and warn him of the folly of so

doing. But, in his own case, he was so utterly without prevision or hesitation, that if anyone had endeavoured (which no one did) to reason with him on the subject, he would have answered, "My good friend, you forget he is my cousin, and indeed the same as a brother to me, so of course in my case, your arguments do not apply." In short, Gerald judged, as such natures are apt to do, of others, by themselves. In age, Sidney was his cousin's senior by two years. He was rather short, his features were irregular, and he had dark, crisp, curly hair and whiskers. He had a habit of looking scrutinizingly at anyone when first introduced to them, without speaking, which was extremely annoying to many, and unless he chose to be intimate with you, he made you feel, however often you might meet or converse with him, that you did not know him a bit better than when you first saw him.

Such was the man who sat in Gerald's room in Duke Street, waiting rather impatiently for him to finish his letter on the day on which we have first introduced them to the reader.

Gerald Lennox, as we are already aware, had forfeited his income when he joined the Catholic Church, and that morning he had begged his cousin Sidney to see his men of business, and explain to them that no consideration would induce him to benefit by his Godfather's bequest, a day longer than was necessary. The firm were to have an

interview with his uncle, Lord Norwood, that very day on the subject, and Sidney had informed the principal partner of Gerald's decision in compliance with his wishes. The solicitor was of opinion that this was a Quixotic determination on the part of his client, and it was with reference to their interview that Sidney had spoken on entering his cousin's room.

"Now, my dear boy, will you walk with me as far as Grosvenor Square?" said Gerald, as he folded up his note and put it in an envelope. "We can talk as we go along, and I want to see my uncle before he starts for the country this afternoon."

"*Je suis à votre disposition, mon ami,*" was the reply. Sidney Graham took up his hat, and brushed it with his coat sleeve. Then he stood before the glass to arrange his scarf, and inspect himself generally. As he did so, he glanced at the crucifix on the chimney-piece, and said,

"When I first saw that crucifix in your rooms, I thought you would become a Roman Catholic, Gerald, only I fancied you would not have been so long about it."

"Oh, I have had that a long time," returned Lennox, rising, and putting an arm over the other's shoulder, as he gazed on the sacred symbol. "So many people have them now, I wonder you thought anything of that."

"It is one of the signs, my dear fellow. I

always notice that as long as people confine their admiration to the Cross, minus the Christ, they are pretty safe. But, once that prejudice against the figure overcome—their fate is fixed in my opinion."

"Then you confess it to be a prejudice, to object to the figure, without which the Cross itself loses half its significance?"

"The stupidest, most intolerable prejudice, viewed in the light of common sense. But a very allowable and natural one, when we consider how many persons look upon all that approaches to, or tends towards Popery, as the greatest evil which can befall humanity!"

"Sidney, why will you not allow your strong common sense to prevail with you? You confess that it would lead you in our direction," said Gerald Lennox, earnestly, trying to look in his cousin's face as he spoke.

"Nonsense," replied the other, turning away from him. "I don't go in for religion, and that sort of thing, as you know, and if I did, I doubt if I should ever incline towards Catholicism. It requires too much of one, and is not so easy going a system, as plain unpretending Protestantism, and so that would suit me better, I take it."

"Sidney!" exclaimed Gerald, as though about to make some hasty rejoinder. Then stopping short, he took up his hat and gloves, and saying, "Come along, are you ready?" led the way from

the room, down the stairs and out into the street.

For some little way the cousins walked on in silence. Then having crossed Piccadilly into Berkeley Street, Gerald said,

"Father Clifford has written to the Abbé Beaufort in Brussels, to know if there is an opening for an English Professor at any of the Colleges there. I am determined to earn my living somehow, and the Church can do nothing for one in this country. I have no vocation for the Priesthood, and no turn for any of the 'Professions.' How much I now regret that my father did not insist on my doing something, even though Sir Gerald had left me twenty thousand a year. If a man has no landed property to look after, a large fortune is a curse to him rather than a blessing, unless he chance to be a saint, and I am not one yet, at any rate. My little independence has kept me happily employed in doing nothing till now, and I was foolishly allowed to do nothing by those who ought to have bullied me into a more useful line of life. Even a married man is better off, but I don't think I shall ever marry." And Gerald sighed and flourished his stick in the air to the consternation of the passers-by as he spoke.

"Take care what you are about with that stick," rejoined his cousin, "and don't talk nonsense. I daresay you will marry, and as to your having led a useless life hitherto, I know few men

who have done so much with their money as you have. I'll be bound you will feel your loss of the 'ready,' much less than the poor people and others who have benefited by your liberality hitherto. But seriously, my dear fellow, you must not talk in that way about earning your living, and taking up with a Professorship abroad. Just as if Lord Norwood would allow of such a thing, and Uncle Lennox would not fancy it much either, I should say."

"I don't see what my uncle would have to do with it, and if my father objected, why of course I should ask him to propose some other plan, equally feasible. But as far as that goes I don't think he will interfere in the matter."

"You have not heard from him yet, have you?" asked Sidney.

"No, only from Blanche and Ferdinand, and one line from my poor mother," was the reply. "Their letters nearly broke my heart, and I can quite afford to wait for my father's, which will be the least agreeable of the lot, I suspect."

"Gerald, I told you you were not counting the cost, before you took the step. You thought they would all take it so easily, that they would all be prepared for it, and you see you were wrong. I was quite certain that it would fall upon them at Wentmore like a thunder-clap."

"Ferdinand's surprise is what confounds me so," said Gerald, more as if speaking to himself

than to his cousin. "I thought he must have known what was coming, and it seems he had not a suspicion. Oh, Sidney, I can hardly bear it when I think of him," and he grasped the other's arm with a violence that caused Graham to wince. Smiling, he turned towards Gerald, exclaiming,

"It will all come right, old fellow, in time. Here we are at the corner of the square. Now I shall say goodbye, and we meet again to-morrow at the club. I shall be there at five. *Au revoir.*"

Grasping each others' hands they stood for a moment on the pavement. Then Sidney turned away, and Gerald hastened on towards his uncle Lord Norwood's house, which was one of the largest in Grosvenor Square.

"Is Lady Margaret at home?" he asked the servant who opened the door wide immediately on seeing him.

"Yes sir," was the answer. And he ran up the large handsome staircase and opened the door of a lovely little boudoir which communicated with the landing above. In it was seated a young lady of—but why persist in that odious habit of particularizing young ladies ages? She was more than nineteen, and that is enough; we will even go further and surmise that five-and-twenty summers had passed over her head, and after that the most curious on the subject must needs be satisfied. Lady Margaret was not ridiculously young, nor was she wonderfully beautiful. She was short-

sighted, and wore a glass dangling by her side, which constantly found its way to her left eye. Sometimes, (though low be it spoken,) when Lady Margaret found occasion, a pair of spectacles were substituted for the eye-glass ; but *she* was not ashamed of this, whatever her bosom friend, if she had one, may have been. Lady Margaret had not many very dear friends ; as a rule, she was not liked much by those of her own sex. With gentlemen she was popular, but she was very particular as to whom she admitted to her friendship, and it did not at all follow because you received a card for Lord Norwood's ball, that therefore you were to be let in when you called and asked if Lady Margaret Stewart was at home a few days afterwards. But those who really knew her, whether men or women, thought well of her, and spoke well of her, and by none was she more highly esteemed than by her cousin, Gerald Lennox, who looked upon her as a "Pearl," whose worth was indeed great.

"My uncle is going to-day?" he said, as he took Lady Margaret's hand and imprinted a kiss upon it. "I knew he would not be in now, of course, but wished to catch him before he went."

"Yes, he is going this afternoon," was the reply. And Lady Margaret went on with the work she had in hand when her cousin entered. "He wanted very much to see you," she added, "I think he will go to Wentmore before he comes

back, he is so very anxious to see your father and mother. Have you heard from them yet?"

"Not from my father," answered Gerald, taking a seat by her side, "and I did not much expect he would write yet. He was away from home, staying with the Bishop when Ferdinand got my letter. I have heard from him and Blanche, as I told you."

"And from Aunt Frances?" said Lady Margaret, looking up at him enquiringly.

"Just one line. Poor darling mother!" And Gerald covered his face with his hand, and half strangled a sob as he spoke.

"Gerald!" exclaimed Lady Margaret, flinging down her work and laying her hand on his arm as she spoke. "How could you! oh, how *could* you do it? knowing what a grief, what a blow it would be to them all?"

"Margaret, I did not expect that you would speak like that," returned Gerald, starting up and pacing up and down the room. "What is the use of tormenting me with such a question as that? as if every pang they endure, I did not suffer twice over, and as if any consideration of the kind could or ought to weigh with me for one moment!"

"No, of course you think that, but *I* could never bring myself to do such a thing. If it was a question with me of following out a theoretical notion of right, or saving those I love and am

bound to consider, pain and suffering, I should save them and risk it myself!"

"No, you wouldn't Margaret," said Gerald, stopping and looking her full in the face. "There is no one who would do what is right at all costs more determinedly than you would. Don't malign yourself."

"But how you could think it right!" exclaimed Lady Margaret, with an impatient toss of her hand. "How you could bring yourself to think it necessary to make your father, mother, brother, sister, everyone dear to you in the world, miserable, for the sake of believing in things I don't believe you *can* believe in, and joining a Church which teaches such extraordinary doctrines, and permits such abuses as you know the Church of Rome does, I cannot imagine. Gerald, it is not yet too late! Come back—don't let these wretched priests, or whoever they are, keep you in their meshes. Give them up and all will be right again. Do!"

Gerald was about to reply with heightened colour and excited mien, when the door opened, and a man of between fifty and sixty years of age entered the room, who hastily approached, and took him by the arm, saying, "I heard you were here, my boy, and must have a few words with you before I go. Come down to my room, and you and Margaret can finish your chat afterwards."

Lord Norwood (for he it was) was a remarkable looking man. His tall commanding figure and dignified bearing, gave him an appearance of being younger than he was. His hair and whiskers were grey, his forehead somewhat bald, his nose high and prominent, his eyes dark and penetrating. His manner was that of one accustomed to respect and attention. His courtesy and gentleness were those of the most refined high breeding. His affection for all his family was great, and this step which his nephew had taken, knowing as he did how much it would affect and distress his parents, excited and moved him exceedingly.

"Come back here, afterwards," cried Lady Margaret, as her father carried Gerald off with him, and her cousin nodded in acquiescence.

When they were gone and the door had closed, Lady Margaret leaned back in her chair. She covered her face with her hands, and the tears trickled slowly through her fingers. She was very unhappy. Her cousin Gerald had always been so perfect in her estimation, the romance and enthusiasm of his character had only lent it additional charms in her eyes. But that he should have done such a thing as this, set the world and its opinion at defiance, and joined a Church of which she held so very low an opinion as she did of that of Rome, was a puzzle and a mortification to her, and she could not quite forgive him for it, try as hard as she might. She did not remain thus long

however, but after heaving two or three profound sighs, she wiped her eyes and resumed her work, saying to herself, "Ah, well! we all of us have our faults, and perhaps his are the more hard to excuse because he has so few." And then she worked on silently at her frame until the door again opened, and Gerald Lennox appeared.

He looked pale and wearied. "I cannot stay now, Margaret," he said, as she rose from her seat and came towards him. "Your father I am afraid is annoyed because I will not consent to his asking anything for me from the Newcome Trustees, whose help he thinks I ought not to refuse till I can look about me. But I have a little, just a very little of my own, and that must do until I can earn something for myself, unless, of course, my father gives me assistance which I do not expect, but should not refuse if he offered it. I could not reconcile it to my conscience to take one penny of Sir Gerald's money after having openly become a Catholic, and indeed from the time I made up my mind, I ceased to draw upon my bankers, and now it would be impossible for me to do so."

Lady Margaret held his hand in hers for a moment without speaking. Then she said, "I cannot argue with you about this, and I feel that you are acting rightly and nobly, but I wish ——" and she paused and looked wistfully in his face.

"You wish I could put my conscience in my pocket, eh?" said Gerald, smiling. "No, I can't

quite do that, and so goodbye for the present. I shall see you again in a day or two, I daresay."

As Gerald left the house, a carriage drove up to the door, and some luggage which stood in the hall was brought out and placed in it. "Which train do you catch?" he asked of the coachman, who touched his hat to him as he spoke.

"The 4.30 sir," answered the man. "My lord always likes to be in good time."

Before returning to his lodgings, Gerald visited the Church in Farm Street, where he had been received into Catholic communion shortly before, and knelt for a few minutes before the Blessed Sacrament in earnest prayer. He then passed up South Street into the park, and walked slowly towards Hyde Park Corner, thinking of many things as he went along, and giving the "cut direct" though quite unintentionally, to more than one of his acquaintance who met him on the way.

It was a quarter to five when he reached his bachelor quarters in Duke Street. He let himself in with his latch-key, and was passing upstairs, when the servant of the house emerging from some mysterious region in the back of the premises, exclaimed, "There is a gentleman upstairs sir. I told him you was out, but he said he would wait."

"Did he give you his name?" asked Gerald, pausing on the stairs.

"No sir. He's a young gentleman and is mak-

ing hisself quite at home sir," responded the maiden, in rather an aggrieved tone of voice.

"Making himself at home! Who can it be I wonder," muttered Gerald as he mounted the remaining stairs and opened the door of his sitting-room.

"I'm sure I don't know who it could be or what was a going on," reported the servant maid, who had followed him upstairs gently, and remained a listener outside the door for a few minutes after it had closed. "The other jumped up, I saw that, but the door banged-to so that I couldn't see nothing more. They neither of them never said a word, or I must have heard it. Not one word. It beats me, it does."

The mistress of the house to whom this communication was addressed, pondered over it a few minutes, and then as she could make nothing out of it, scolded the maid for listening, and determined to make an excuse for going into the gentleman's room herself in the course of a few minutes, for the purpose of reconnoitring on her own account.

The "young gentleman who was making hisself so much at home," Gerald recognized immediately on opening the door of his room, as his brother Ferdinand. It was a great and unexpected pleasure to see his brother at this moment, but for the first time in his life a painful feeling mingled with the pleasure. He felt that

he had been the cause of bringing sorrow on that brother who was so unutterably dear to him, sorrow of the bitterest, because for a time anyhow, of the most hopeless kind. Ever since the young Lennoxes had been big boy and little boy together, they had been united in no ordinary love and affection for each other. Gerald had felt proud of his office of protector and counsellor in their youthful days, and Ferdinand had looked up to him gratefully and lovingly as his model of all that was manly and good. As years had gone by, and the boys had grown into men, the feeling of mutual dependence and regard had increased upon both. Often the more sombre temperament of the elder brother had been brightened and cheered by the laughter-loving younger one. Often would the thoughtlessness of the younger have led him into difficulties had it not been for the watchful love of the elder. In everything they had agreed. On no two subjects, unless it was something very trifling, had their opinions been divided. Above all, they had been united in that deepest, closest bond of unity, Religious Sympathy. An earnest feeling of devotion to, and love for what they considered the "Church of their Baptism," had distinguished both—for young as Ferdinand was, he had been thrown by constant companionship with his brother, into the society of the best and most earnest-minded men the High Church party could boast, and

instinctively had imbibed their principles and feelings.

But Gerald's residence in London whilst Ferdinand was either pursuing his studies at the University or with a private tutor, and latterly his absence on a continental tour, had rendered it more difficult for the younger brother to follow the elder in the bent of religious thought and study, to which Gerald had lent himself. Gradually a feeling of uncertainty had arisen in Ferdinand's mind, (chiefly from the fact that in his letters Gerald very seldom or very slightly touched upon the question,) as to whether they were indeed so perfectly in accord on this all-important point as they used to be. It was one of the subjects he had determined to enter upon as soon as they met. This meeting had been delayed by one unforeseen circumstance after another, longer than either had anticipated, and before it took place, Gerald had been received into the communion of the Roman Catholic Church, and his brother had been made acquainted with the fact by the letter which his sister had put into his hands at Wentmore, as we have seen.

And so a gulf had spread itself between them, a gulf which there was no passing, Ferdinand felt, save in one way, viz. by his following his brother's example, for such a step once taken, he knew Gerald too well to believe there was any likelihood of its being retraced by him. And deep

as was his love for his brother, he was too conscientiously and sincerely attached to what he believed to be the 'Catholic and Apostolic' Church of England to desert her communion from any motive whatever, short of absolute conviction of either her want of orders, or lack of what he considered necessary to the existence and being of a true Church. It might, and he felt it would, well-nigh break his heart to be separated from his brother in all that they had hitherto held most sacred in common, but not for a thousand brothers, or from any motive of personal affection whatever, would Ferdinand Lennox give up what he had hitherto (and still) considered to be, his unassailable position in the English Church. At first he had been so stunned and overpowered by the announcement of Gerald's conversion, that he had scarcely realized all the consequences such a step involved—but whatever of pain and suffering it might entail upon himself, Ferdinand's principal feeling had been one of keenest sympathy for his brother. Knowing Gerald as he did, he comprehended without any telling, all the effort amounting to agony, which it must have cost him to place such a barrier between himself, his family, and home, all that he held nearest and dearest in the world, and knew that Gerald would suffer far more in inflicting such a blow, than they would in receiving it.

Having said and done all he could to comfort

his mother and Blanche, and having waited to discuss the subject in all its bearings with his father and to meet the brunt of his displeasure and sorrow, Ferdinand hastened to seek his brother, to throw himself into his arms, and gather from his own observation the assurance as to whether or not he was to look upon himself in future, as the chief sufferer from this event.

CHAPTER VI.

As Gerald opened the door of his sitting-room, Ferdinand started up and advanced with heightened colour and open arms towards him. Gerald became very pale, but hastily closing the door, (much to the disgust of the damsel outside, as we know,) he turned to meet his brother, and without speaking a word, folded him to his breast. For some time, both were too much moved by the feelings of the moment to do more than look at each other, trying to smile and to subdue the strong emotion they felt. Then leading Ferdinand to a chair, Gerald found voice to say, "Can you,—can you forgive me?"

"As if there was anything to forgive," answered the other, forgetful at once as he looked on his brother's countenance of all he had himself gone through. "You have done what you thought right at great cost to yourself, I am sure of that. May God bless you, brother, and if you are happy I shall never regret the step you have taken."

Gerald tried several times to answer, but could not. At last with an effort, he exclaimed, "And my mother and Blanche. How did you leave them?"

"Pretty well. You know what their love for you is. Of course they have felt it deeply, but they think most of you, and I shall be severely cross-questioned on my return, as to how you were looking *et cetera*."

Gerald squeezed his brother's hand. "I will give you a few lines to take back," he said. "And my father? I have been expecting to hear from him by each post. Did you give him my letter?"

"I did. Of course, I mean—it was only natural," said Ferdinand, with some hesitation, "that he should have been very much upset. We were all taken by surprise, but he was more unprepared I suppose, than any of us. You won't like his letter, I'm afraid, but it will be all right by-and-by."

Gerald tore open the epistle which his brother held out to him as he spoke, and read it in silence. Once during its perusal, he uttered an exclamation, but instantly checked himself. He read it twice over, and then starting from his seat, rushed into the inner room, and closed the door behind him.

Ferdinand had seen the letter, and knew what the other must be suffering. He, too, sprang from his chair, but did not attempt to follow

Gerald, feeling that at such a moment his brother was best left alone. He paced the small apartment with agitated strides, but never approached the door which communicated with the other room. After some time had elapsed, it opened, and Gerald appeared, but so ghastly pale was his look, and such suffering seemed stamped on every feature, that Ferdinand started and exclaimed,

“ My God ! Gerald, old fellow, I had no idea you would feel it thus !—surely—”

“ Don't speak to me, my dear boy, yet,” interrupted the other. “ Feel it ? of course I must feel it ! Do you know what he says about my mother and Blanche ? that I must not see them—must not go to Wentmore without his permission ? and that he would not have allowed you even to come to me, if he had not been so sure of your steadfastness and regard for his opinion and wishes as to be able to trust you, telling me that I have broken his heart and my mother's. I,—who have made their every wish my law ever since I can remember, and in doing what I have now done, have only followed their own injunction of putting God first in everything, and most certainly, therefore, in such a question as religion,—upbraiding me too, so bitterly. Ferdinand, it is too much. I cannot bear it ! ” and Gerald sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands as he spoke.

Ferdinand, whose great love for his brother

made him feel deeply for this sorrow which he was powerless to alleviate, knew at the same time how great a shock the "perversion" of that brother had been to his father, and he was thankful as he witnessed the pain which the letter had inflicted, that he had obtained the alteration of several sentences and expressions which had stood much more strongly in the original. For a few moments he was silent, then leaning one arm on the chimney-piece, and looking first at Gerald and then at the Crucifix, he said in a low tone, "It will be easier to bear after a time, and you have the comfort of feeling that what you have done was done from a sense of right. By-and-by, my father will see that too, and be ready to acknowledge it, and honour you for it. Till then, *you* must feel that your cross, however heavy, is a blessed one, and you will learn endurance from this Great Example," and he laid his hand on the sacred symbol as he spoke.

"You are right, dearest fellow," cried Gerald, looking up. "It was a hard struggle, but is over now, and you have helped me through it. If ever such a time comes for you, may you be spared even half of what it has cost me!"

"Nay, nay;" returned Ferdinand, hastily. "We will not speak of that, that is not likely, and—when do you dine?" he added, looking at his watch, and anxious to change the subject. "Uncle Norwood is out of town, or I should have

proposed going there. I saw him for a moment at the station when I arrived. He called out to me as I was getting into a cab, and said he was waiting for his train to go to Ashenhurst. Is Margaret at home, do you know?"

"Yes, she is," answered Gerald; "but this evening she is going out, I believe. We had better go down to the club. We shall find Sidney there, he will like to see you, and we can dine together. That will be the best way."

"Sidney! I haven't seen him for ages. To be sure, let us go. He will be surprised to see me I daresay. Is he altered at all since—oh, it's two years nearly since we met. Do you see much of him, Gerald?"

"Yes, a great deal," was the answer. "I don't know what I should have done of late without him, he has been everything to me."

Ferdinand did not make any remark, but as he took Gerald's arm and walked down the streets in which the lamps were now lighted, towards the club, he thought a good deal of this intimacy between his brother and cousin, and wondered at it not a little.

There was no railway station at Wentmore, the nearest was more than four miles off, and an omnibus ran to and fro, conveying passengers, (if any there were to convey,) in the morning, and returning in the evening after the arrival of the seven o'clock train from London. On the day

following that on which Ferdinand Lennox appeared in Duke Street, two young men got into the "Blunderbuss," (as that young gentleman disrespectfully termed the said conveyance,) as it was about to depart on its return journey from the station to Wentmore. The porter civilly touched his cap as he acquainted them that their luggage was safely deposited on the roof, and having ascertained by a survey of the interior that their only travelling companion was a farmer's wife, who had already composed herself to sleep in a corner of the vehicle, they made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, exchanged their 'tiles' for caps, put up their legs on the opposite seat, and commenced an earnest conversation, as with a jerk and a crack of the driver's whip the omnibus started on its way. Ferdinand Lennox and Sidney Graham had just come down by the train from town, and were on their way to Wentmore Rectory.

"I *was* surprised yesterday," Graham began, "when I looked up and saw you and Gerald come into the room at the club. I guessed at once from his being with you who it was, or else you are so altered that I should not have known you."

"It was very good of you to come down with me now," said Ferdinand, without noticing the latter part of his cousin's speech. "My father gets very much excited, and I feel too much for

Gerald not to take his part often, and then it only makes my mother and Blanche more unhappy if they see us at variance, so altogether a fresh arrival will be of great use amongst us just now."

"What we must all try and do is, to put the idea of going abroad out of Gerald's head," rejoined Sidney, after a moment's pause. "He is so proud that he will not live at home upon your father after what has happened, and he won't accept a farthing from the Newcome Trustees, even if they are disposed to offer anything."

"That is what makes me so mad!" exclaimed Ferdinand, vehemently. "I feel a perfect beast for taking that income away from him, poor dear fellow, when of course I should not otherwise have had a penny of it. Old Sir Gerald ought to have been ashamed of himself for making such a will. I am determined that something shall be tried to make Gerald have part of it, but it was of no use my saying anything to him. We nearly quarrelled about it as it was."

"Will Uncle Lennox make him any allowance do you think?" asked Sidney.

"Not enough for him to live upon. He is so very angry, that he rather likes to think of Gerald's being in difficulty, as helping to show him how foolishly he has behaved. And as far as this world goes, he has been foolish certainly."

"Yes, there are not many men who would give

up a thousand-a-year for conscience sake," said Sidney.

The omnibus coming to a sudden stand in order to set down an outside passenger, and the farmer's wife waking up to ask a number of questions as to how far they had got, what was the matter, and when she would reach her own destination, etc., the conversation between the cousins was interrupted, and the remainder of the journey was passed in silence, broken only by observations as to the time, the discomfort of the vehicle, or other casual remarks.

"Here we are," cried Ferdinand, as the conveyance turned a corner in the road, and began descending a hill at the foot of which the trees surrounding Wentmore Rectory could be seen in their richly variegated foliage. "There is John at the gate. I told them I should most likely be down again this evening."

At the entrance of the Rectory grounds the omnibus drew up and the young men alighted. Having paid their fare, and handed over their luggage to the footman, they walked in silence up the drive towards the house. The hall door was half open, and although not yet dark without, a bright light dispelled the dusk within. "It is some time since you have been down here, Sidney, isn't it?" said Ferdinand, as they entered the house. "They will have done dinner, I daresay, and we shall have a big tea prepared for us, or

something of that sort. Come in here. We are sure to find some one." And without waiting to disembarass himself of his travelling gear, the young man threw open the dining-room door, and entered the room followed by his cousin.

Mr. Lennox and Lady Frances were sitting near the fire-place. Dinner was over, as Ferdinand had anticipated. Dessert was on the table, the young ladies had withdrawn, and the husband and wife had placed themselves in easy chairs on either side of the rug. Lady Frances leaned back in her's. She looked pale and worn, but a smile lighted up her face as she turned round at the sound of the opening door, and caught sight of her son. Mr. Lennox put down the newspaper he was reading, and holding out his hand, said,

"Come back, my boy? We have only just done dinner, but did not wait as we were not certain of you. I did not think you would come to-night, but your mother did, and has ordered a separate repast for you, I believe. And who is this you have with you?"

"Sidney Graham," answered Ferdinand, kissing his mother. Then turning to his father, he added, "He was going to write and offer a visit, and as I knew there was plenty of room, I told him he had better come back with me, and save himself the trouble."

"Quite right, and very glad I am to see you, Sid," said Mr. Lennox, grasping his nephew's

proffered hand. "It is some time since you were here last, and a breath of fresh air will do you good. Have you seen the girls? Do they know you've come?"

Sidney Graham, who was a perfect man of the world, and always did the right thing under any circumstances, was busy paying his respects to Lady Frances of whom he stood rather in awe, and whose welcome was not quite so cordial as her husband's, but who nevertheless assured him she was very glad to see him again at Wentmore. Ferdinand answered his father's query by saying they had come straight into the dining-room and had seen no one. "But I will soon find them," he exclaimed. "I hear the piano in the library, I think." And leaving the room, he went in quest of his sister and Barbara.

Guided by the sound of music, he entered the spacious and handsomely-furnished apartment on the further side of the hall, which contained the Rector's large and valuable collection of books, and which from its cheerful look-out in the morning and comfortable aspect in the evening, was at all times a favourite resort with the family. Blanche and Barbara Lennox were beginning to practise a vocal duet as the door was flung open and Ferdinand appeared. They both sprang forward with exclamations of surprise.

"Mamma and I said you would come back to-night," cried Blanche, as he kissed first her and

then his cousin in that off-hand brotherly way which often annoyed Barbara, but which she did not know how to resent, "and papa and Bibi thought you wouldn't. And how is Gerald?"

Her eyes filled with tears, and her sweet face looked inexpressibly sad as she spoke, holding both her brother's hands in her's, and gazing up at him inquiringly.

"He is pretty well, I will tell you all about him presently. I have brought Sidney Graham down with me. How are you, darling?" And he kissed his sister again tenderly as he spoke.

"We are all behaving better now," was the answer. "But Ferdinand, it has been terrible whilst you were away."

"Go into the dining-room, please Bibi, and tell them to send out and let me know as soon as the tea is ready, we shall be on the lawn under the trees. Come with me, darling," continued Ferdinand, putting his arm round Blanche's neck, and leading her into the hall, "we can walk up and down, and you will tell me exactly how things are going on. Is my father very angry still? Or does he take it a little quieter?"

Blanche snatched up a shawl and gathered it round her. Then as they passed out at the hall door, and approached the trees to which her brother had alluded, she turned to him and said, "Papa is, I am afraid, very angry and hurt at what he considers Gerald's setting up his opinion

against his, and Bibi takes very much the same tone which does not make it any better. Poor mamma is miserable. You know how she loves Gerald, and she is indignant at his being forbidden to come home, but I think it is much better for his sake that he should not see papa just at present. He used not to have the best of tempers, and unless he is very much altered I am sure there would be a quarrel, because, of course, if he is acting from conviction, (and you and I know him too well to doubt that,) he would not give way in the least, and that would irritate papa beyond everything. But how is he, Ferdinand? And do you think he is really happy?"

"I am sure of it," answered Ferdinand, gravely. "As far as he is concerned, intensely as he feels all the sorrow and pain he is giving *us*, you need have no anxiety. He seems so thoroughly satisfied that what he has done, was the only thing to be done. I was very much struck by the utter absence of all care, save for us, which he evinced. About himself or his own future he would say but little. As to religious matters, controversy, doubts, everything of that sort appeared with him to be at an end. He seemed completely at rest."

"At rest," repeated Blanche, thoughtfully. "Then he must indeed be happy. Dear, dear Gerald!—I do not mind telling you, Ferdinand," she added, after a moment's pause, "that it has puzzled me dreadfully, the last day or two when

thinking over everything, to find out why it is, when there is so little difference in what we believe really, that we are so very much distressed at his having become a Roman Catholic. I mean," she continued hastily, as Ferdinand seemed about to interrupt her, "apart from family and personal feelings altogether. Putting affection and separation amongst ourselves and all that sort of thing aside, what is there so very bad in anyone's leaving one part of the Church for another? For we recognise the Church of Rome as a *part* of the True Church of course?"

"Certainly; the Latin branch of the Catholic Church *is* a branch of the one True Church," answered Ferdinand, "but she is a corrupt and erring branch, and for that reason we separated from her at the Reformation."

"But, my dear Ferdinand," rejoined Blanche, eagerly, "I have often heard you agree with Gerald that the Reformation was anything but a blessing to the Church of England. I even remember your going so far as to say that *nothing* could justify it."

"As to that," answered Ferdinand, hastily, "I may have expressed myself stronger than I intended. On the whole I *do* consider the Reformation (as it is called) to have been a misfortune rather than a blessing for the English Church. But there is no doubt that in some things, the lives of the clergy for instance, there was great

need of improvement, and the Church had got into a wretched state altogether."

"As to the lives of any individual members of the Church, however bad they may be, I do not see that they can affect the truth of her doctrines, or that, if they disobey her rules, she is in any way responsible for their conduct. And besides, the very things which the Reformers were so determined to get rid of, you and I believe to be necessary to the very existence of a Church. If it is essential to deny the Pope's Supremacy, we may regard their work with some sort of satisfaction, but on every other account I see nothing but cause for regret in what they did."

Ferdinand Lennox did not immediately reply to this speech of his sister's, but walked up and down for a minute or two in silence. Then stopping suddenly, he laid a hand on each of her shoulders, and looking earnestly in her face, said,

"My dear Blanche, there are many things which puzzle us in the history of the Church, and especially in the history of the so-called Reformation. There is no doubt that it was either the work of God, or the work of the Evil One. If the latter, then the sooner we abjure it and all connection with it, the better; but you and I know how many good things we owe it. Witness our beautiful and heart-stirring services. You have been in churches abroad, and you know how puzzling and confused the service often seems, the very fact

of the prayers and psalms being for the most part in Latin, makes it impossible for an unlettered congregation to join readily and heartily in what is going on. You know how different it is with us. Can anything be more beautiful and in accordance with one's feeling of what a Catholic service *ought* to be than that of All Saints, Margaret Street, for instance, where everyone understands what is going on, and all join together with heart and voice as one man? And there are higher blessings still than these, which the Reformation has purchased for us. *We* have free access to the Bible, the Word of God, and *we* have an unmutilated Sacrament, for we receive the Holy Communion in both kinds, which you know Romanists are not allowed to do. And is not that in itself worth everything?"

He still held her at arm's length, and with an anxious, earnest gaze, awaited her response. Blanche looked up at him and smiled, and then pushing his arm away, threw her's round his neck, and kissing him fondly, cried,

"I daresay you are right, and I am foolish to torment myself about these things, but you know one cannot help it sometimes. Now let us go in, for I am sure your tea must be ready by this time."

"Come to the study presently, I want to speak to you;" whispered Ferdinand to his cousin Bar-

bara, as the ladies were leaving the drawing-room that night.

She smiled and nodded, and having said good night to her aunt at the top of the stairs, and promised Blanche to come and see her in her room in half an hour's time, Barbara hastened along a corridor which led to the further end of the house, and descending a stair, entered the room which at Wentmore Rectory was known as "the Study." It was a snug little apartment, and the favourite resort of the sons of the family when they were at home, being so completely "out of the way" as they said; and attentive Mrs. Statham, it being rather a chilly evening, had ordered a fire to be lighted and the curtains drawn, and the room otherwise set in order, in case Mr. Ferdinand should wish to spend an hour or so there before going to bed. Barbara lighted a couple of wax candles which stood on the table, and drawing an arm-chair near the fire, sat down upon it, with her feet on the fender, and waited Ferdinand's approach. "What does he want to speak to me about?" she wondered. She had not to wonder long, for presently footsteps were heard along the passage, and in another minute her cousin entered the room.

"Oh! you are here; that's right," he exclaimed on seeing her. Then placing himself with his back to the fire, in the attitude most favoured by the Englishman at home, he looked round the

room, and said, "How nice it is to be here again. This dear old room in which we have all spent so many happy hours. I never feel that I am really at home till I am down here with the old pictures and things about me, and talking to one of you girls or dear old Gerald. Ah! I wonder when he will be here again!" And turning round, he leaned against the chimney-piece with one foot on the fender, in an attitude of deep thought.

Barbara did not speak, but sat with her eyes steadily fixed on the fire. She knew what was passing in his mind, and did not venture to intrude any remark of her own.

The fire did not want stirring, but Ferdinand stirred it nevertheless. Then putting the poker down with a bang, he turned to his cousin, and said,

"Barbara, I want to speak to you about Gerald and about Blanche. I can speak to you better than to anyone else. You will understand me and what I feel in a way neither my father nor mother can do, and I cannot of course say to them what I can to you. You know how miserable I must be about this step he has taken." He paused a moment, cleared his voice, and then resumed. "We had gone together hand in hand so long. I had made so many happy plans for the future, when I should have a parish and church of my own, and everything I did and cared about would be a matter of interest to him as well. I know he

will always care about what I do still. He is the same dear, warm-hearted, affectionate fellow that he ever was, but all that is different, it can't be the same thing, and I feel as if I had lost my interest in the future altogether. But I don't want to talk about myself, but about him and his concerns. You know that I am suddenly a rich man, or at least shall be when I am of age, in consequence of his having left the Church of England, and that he has, you may say, not a penny in the world?"

He waited as if for some remark from his cousin after saying this. He had again turned towards the fire and was not looking at her.

Suddenly she rose from her seat and stood beside him, leaning her hand on his shoulder.

"Ferdinand, my dear brother, I cannot say how much I feel for you, I cannot;" and she broke down with a half sob as she spoke.

Ferdinand looked round in astonishment. He had expected sympathy but not emotion from his usually placid cousin. Bending down, he kissed her forehead, and said, "Dearest Bibi, as long as I have you and Blanche left to me I ought to be contented. There are very few who have two such sisters," and he kissed her again.

Barbara did not return his kiss, but she squeezed his hand and sat down again. And a slight shade of annoyance passed over her face as she did so.

Now this was unreasonable of Barbara. If she

called Ferdinand her brother, why should she be offended at his calling her his sister?

"Now I am determined that he shall not suffer in this way, if I can possibly help it," resumed Ferdinand. "But the difficulty is, to make him take a penny in consequence of old Sir Gerald's will, after what he has done. I have said all I can to him on the subject, and it is of no use."

"As far as that goes, Ferdinand, although I quite understand the generous affection which makes you feel as you do about it, I think he ought to suffer, and I don't pity him one bit."

"Barbara!" cried Ferdinand, turning round and staring at her, "I don't understand you."

"My dear boy," said Barbara, "you know how I love you and Blanche." There was the least possible stress on the word *you* as she spoke, "and when I see you both made miserable by what Gerald has done, you cannot wonder if it makes me indignant and angry. What right had he
_____?"

"But, Barbara," interrupted Ferdinand, hastily, "you do not consider that if he was convinced, as I am sure he was, that it was *necessary* to become a Roman Catholic, he had no choice in the matter, and that it must have cost him more to take such a step even than it has cost us to lose him."

"Nonsense, Ferdinand," answered Barbara, "I don't believe a word of it. He wished to be a

Roman Catholic and he is one. He has got his wish, and others may be miserable if they please."

Ferdinand turned away from her and leaned again upon the chimney-piece. "If you will not understand," he said, "I can't make you. Let us talk about something else. Tell me what you think of Blanche. She seems to me very excited and not at all well, I am quite uneasy about her."

"I shall not speak about Blanche. We were speaking about Gerald, and you are angry with me because I cannot see everything he does in the favourable light you do. I do not pretend to feel about him as you and Blanche do, I never did, but I am sorry if I said anything to vex you. God knows I would not do that if I could help it." And Barbara covered her face with her handkerchief as she spoke.

"My dearest girl, forgive me. I know I was cross," exclaimed Ferdinand, seating himself on a stool by his cousin's side, and taking her hand in his. "All this has upset me, and I daresay I am unreasonable. Your sympathy and affection I feel deeply. Dearest Bibi, indeed I do." And raising the little hand which was not withheld, he pressed it to his lips.

Barbara looked up and smiled, and she looked very pretty smiling through her tears, Ferdinand thought. Perhaps his gaze expressed as much,

for she coloured up with pleasure as their eyes met, and she said,

"I suppose Gerald is not very fond of me, as I generally find that one cares instinctively most for those who care for one. Were you struck by anything particular about darling Blanche's looks?" she continued, anxiously. "You do not know all she has gone through whilst you were away, indeed ever since this news came."

"She does not look well, but that is not what I mean," answered Ferdinand. "I daresay it is all my imagination, but I cannot help thinking that this step of Gerald's is having some effect upon her, and may tend to unsettle her about the Church of England. When talking to her, has anything ever occurred to you of the same sort?"

"We have not touched very much on the controversial part of the subject," said Barbara. "She is so fond of Gerald that she naturally finds every excuse she can for him, but I do not think you need be uneasy on that score. I am sure she is too devoted to our own Church, and too sensible to think of following his example for a moment."

"God grant it," murmured Ferdinand.

Barbara looked at him, and the tears rose in her eyes as she did so. She was really fond of this cousin, and saw that he was suffering. She longed to say something that might comfort him, but did not know how.

Just then, someone was heard descending the stairs from the passage above, and she jumped up, exclaiming, "There, we are going to be interrupted, and so I shall retire. It is Sidney, I think, and he won't want me here. Good night, dear."

Sidney Graham entered the room as she spoke, and looked somewhat dismayed at seeing her. Lighting a bed-room candle which stood on the chimney-piece, Barbara patted her cousin Ferdinand on the shoulder, and nodding to the other, said, "Don't be afraid, Sid, I am going away, and you may have Ferdinand all to yourself. Only don't you two be sitting up all hours of the night, and remember we have prayers punctually at nine o'clock."

She then took herself off, determining in her own mind as she went upstairs and along the passage towards Blanche's room, that whether she regarded one of the cousins she had just left with more than a cousinly feeling or not, she certainly did *not* like the other and never should, though why, she did not exactly know.

The next morning when the plans for the day were discussed after breakfast, it was decided that as it was a lovely morning for a walk, the two young ladies should take Sidney Graham to call at the Oaks. "And you need not expect us back to luncheon," said Blanche, "if we do go,

for they are sure to keep us, but I shall be home in time to go out in the carriage with mamma."

Ferdinand and his father had various business matters to discuss, and retired for that purpose to the library. Blanche looked in upon them before starting. "Have you any message for Mrs. Gregory, papa? we shall go there on our way."

"Remind Miss Hester that it is her day for visiting the schools," answered the Rector, "the schoolmistress complained to me about the irregularity of some of the young ladies' visits, and tell Mrs. Gregory we shall hope to find her at home this afternoon, on our return from Westling."

Westling was a small market town about five miles from Wentmore, and as it boasted one or two shops rather above the country average, it formed an object for a drive for Lady Frances when she had no inducement to go elsewhere. Mr. Lennox always spoke of it jestingly as the "Metropolis."

On leaving Mrs. Gregory's, the walking party encountered Mr. Woods who emerged from Widow Upton's cottage as they were passing.

"Good morning, young ladies," said he. "I was just going up to the Rectory, and you can tell me if I am likely to find Mr. Lennox disengaged?"

"We left him at home, closeted with Ferdinand," answered Blanche, "so you will certainly find him. Tell me, Mr. Woods," she continued,

as Sidney Graham walked on with Barbara, "has Jane Upton any chance of that place you were trying to get for her? I shall be so glad when she is away from that mother, poor girl."

"I have not yet heard from my sister," replied the curate, "but I expect to do so every day. It will be a great thing to get her away from home. One can do very little for her here."

"Do you give the Holy Communion to-morrow to John Haywood?" continued Blanche. "Ferdinand and I both wish to be there when you do. I was with him yesterday for half an hour, and read to him. He seemed very anxious about it. What a blessing it is to see him so prepared, poor fellow. I never leave him without feeling humbled by the sight of his faith and patience."

"Ah! I wish more were like him," answered Mr. Woods. "I have arranged to be there at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and intended to let you know."

Walking by Blanche's side, and passing from one topic of mutual interest to another, Mr. Woods forgot that he was bound in a contrary direction until a turning in the road brought them within sight of two ladies, who advanced towards them from the direction of the Oaks.

"Why, there is Clara Smith," cried Blanche, "and Miss Jones. We must tell Clara we are all going there."

A general stoppage and mutual greetings en-

sued. Miss Smith was on her way to the village under Miss Jones's escort whom she had overtaken on the road. She was delighted to hear of the intended descent upon the Oaks, and begged them to go on. "I must go to Wentmore," she explained, "but shall be back before luncheon, and the others will be so glad to see you."

Mr. Woods then remembered that he must turn back, and did so with Miss Clara and her companion, the others pursuing their way towards the Oaks. For a minute or two the curate walked by the side of the two ladies in silence. Then turning to Miss Smith, he said,

"That gentleman is a cousin of the Miss Lennoxes, is he not? I think I have seen him down here before, but am not sure."

"Yes," answered Clara, "that is Mr. Graham; Mr. Lennox's nephew. I wonder which of his cousins he admires the most."

Mr. Woods quite started.

"There can be little question as to which is the best looking, I should think," said he. "Miss Barbara is very handsome no doubt, but one can scarcely compare her to her cousin."

"Oh, I don't know about that," rejoined Clara, laughing. "Tastes differ, you know. Some people prefer dark beauties to fair." As she spoke, she turned and looked back at the cousins who were now nearly out of sight.

"There can be little question as to which Mr.

Woods prefers," thought Miss Jones, "and I quite agree with him, dear, dear!"

He too was watching the receding figures, apparently forgetful of observation. As they finally disappeared in the distance, he turned round, and said,

"They always seem to me to express the difference between Earth and Heaven."

CHAPTER VII.

LADY MARGARET STEWART sat alone in her boudoir. The London season was long over, and the spacious mansions in Grosvenor Square were for the most part hermetically closed for the winter, so that the air of life about the Earl of Norwood's residence attracted attention from the passer-by. The earl himself was out of town, having matters to attend to at his country seat in Southshire. He purposed spending a few days with his sister at Wentmore before his return, after which Lady Margaret was to accompany him on a series of visits which were to terminate at Christmas time with a family gathering at his son Lord Dereham's place in Norfolk.

Lady Margaret was writing. The afternoon was damp, and the low davenport at which she sat was drawn near the fire. Whatever was the nature of her correspondence, it seemed entirely to absorb her, the pen flew over the paper rapidly, sheet after sheet was filled and thrown aside, and still

she wrote on. At length she paused, and taking up a letter which had been finished and enclosed in its envelope, she unfolded it and ran her eye over its contents once more. Then, with it still open in her hand, she leaned back in her chair, and looked round the room. Her eyes fixed themselves upon a small cabinet which stood at one end of the luxuriously fitted little apartment, but her thoughts were evidently far away. She saw, as it were, without seeing. Presently she roused herself, however, and reading the letter in her hand again attentively through, she replaced it in its cover, lighted a taper, sealed it, and rang the bell.

"Put this in the post immediately, will you," she said, as a footman appeared in answer to the summons.

The door was no sooner closed than she again seized her pen, and continued writing uninterruptedly for half an hour. At the end of that time a knock came at the door.

"Come in," she said, without looking up, and her cousin Gerald Lennox entered.

"Am I interrupting you?" he asked, pausing at the sight of her epistolary labours.

"My dear Gerald! of course not. How are you?" answered Lady Margaret, holding out her hand. "I did not expect you this afternoon, but am delighted to see you all the same. I must put away my writing things, and then we will have

some tea and a comfortable chat. You will wonder to whom I am writing," she continued, busily collecting her sheets of paper and arranging them together, "but I shan't gratify your curiosity. It is a long letter and has taken me an enormous time, but it is to no young lady friend, and so you need not suppose it is."

"If you did not wish your correspondent to be known, you should not leave that suspicious looking article, so conspicuously prominent," rejoined Gerald laughingly, pointing to a large envelope which was placed against the clock on the chimney-piece, addressed to a well-known leader of the Broad Church school, to which school Lady Margaret was notoriously attached. "It looks to me exactly calculated to contain those fifty and odd closely written sheets which you have been so busily inditing. Am I not right?"

"How stupid of me to leave it there!" exclaimed his cousin. "The truth is," she added, thrusting the envelope and the other papers which she had collected together into a table drawer, "I have been writing to Mr. M—— about certain subjects on which I desired to have his views and opinion, and have given him mine rather at length. I am sure you, at any rate, cannot find fault with me for seeking ghostly counsel and advice, if I feel that I require them?"

"Far be it from me to do so," replied Gerald,

gravely, as he seated himself in a low chair before the fire. "I only wish you would consult those who are best able to give it you. But I am not come to talk controversy or about your affairs at all just now. Mine is a purely selfish errand, as it is to say that I am going off to-night by the mail train, and I don't know when I shall see you again."

"And where are you off to?" Lady Margaret's hand was on the bell, as she was about to order tea, but she waited to hear his answer before pulling it.

"To Calais, and thence, heaven knows where. I scarcely know myself yet."

The bell was rung sharply.

"And for how long are you going to absent yourself?" inquired Lady Margaret.

"That depends on circumstances. Perhaps for years. At any rate, until I see my way a little clearer into the future than I do at present. I must go abroad, I feel it is the only thing for me to do. I long to breathe air which is really and truly Catholic. I am stifling in this Protestant London, and since I may not see my mother and sister, the sooner I am gone, the better. No one will miss me but you and Ferdinand. I have seen him, and if he can manage it, he talks of coming over for a week or so, to Germany or Belgium (whichever I may go to) himself, so that we may meet again before long."

"And me? You do not consider my regret. I suppose no one is to be thought of excepting Ferdinand," said Lady Margaret, turning away her head.

"Margaret, I know how much you feel for me," cried Gerald, starting up, and taking her hand, "but you cannot help me now, and if we were to meet often, just at present, we should only quarrel, so that in every way it is better that I should go. I am not fit company for my friends, in their opinion at least, and I do not choose to inflict myself upon them."

"Gerald, it is unkind of you to say that," replied Lady Margaret. Then, as the footman entered with a tea-tray and placed it on a small table by her side, she paused. When they were again alone, she added,

"Your Protestant friends are very naturally grieved at your having left their Church. If they had not valued you as a member of it, so truly, they would not care so much about it. Their shewing how deeply they feel the step you have taken, is a proof of their regard for you personally."

"You judge of others by yourself, my dear Margaret," said Gerald. "Feel deeply the step I have taken!" he added, bitterly, "why, is not 'liberty of conscience' the boast of Englishmen? but when I exercise *my* liberty of conscience, and choose to leave the paths of heresy and schism for

the communion of the One True Church, I am to be tabooed and shunned and treated as if I were a lunatic or worse ! I might have become a Presbyterian, a Wesleyan, a Baptist, or anything of that sort I pleased, and the ‘Religious’ world would have rather approved of me than otherwise, whilst the rest of the Community would not have troubled their heads about it, one way or another. But if a man dare to throw off the prejudices and not-to-be-questioned traditions of his childhood, if he venture to do what his teachers are always telling him is his bounden duty (alas ! that so few of them practise what they preach) and enquire for himself, *then* there is such an outcry as never was ! Be sure of this, Margaret, Falsehood and Error shrink from true, honest, searching inquiry. Truth, Divine and Unchangeable alone courts it. ‘Don’t go to Roman Catholic churches, don’t read Roman Catholic books, above all, don’t consult a Roman Catholic Priest.’ That was what all my Anglican friends said to me, whether High, or Low, or Broad. They knew much better what the ‘Roman’ Church taught and believed than the teachers of that Church knew themselves, and as I valued my salvation, (many of my Highest Church advisers put it to me in this light, quite as strongly as the most Evangelical ones would have done,) I must *not* judge for myself in the matter, but lean only upon their dictum and conclusion on the subject.”

"As far as that goes, you know, I look upon both the very High and the very Low as mistaken in many ways," returned Lady Margaret. "People who go to extremes are always bigoted and narrow-minded. It is not that I would not have you search and inquire and judge for yourself. All I would urge is, that you do so fairly and without prejudice and certainly without putting yourself into the hands of such one-sided partisans, for instance, as the Jesuits (whom I know you consulted) were sure to be."

"That is what they all say. Search and inquire in the right direction—which means in any direction but the right one. No, Margaret, that is all nonsense. If I wanted to ascertain some geographical information about the South of France, you would not refer me to a map of England, and when I want to know what Rome teaches, I go to Rome herself to find out, and not to her enemies and traducers. But now, my dear cousin, I must say goodbye. Sidney Graham is coming up from Wentmore to-day. He meets me at the station and goes with me to Calais. He is, and has been, a true friend to me indeed."

Now Sidney Graham was one of Lady Margaret's pet aversions. She knew him, of course, and for Gerald's sake, who was so fond of him, she had tried to like him, but had not succeeded in doing so. Sidney always received cards for the balls at Norwood House, and once or twice during

the season when other family connections were asked to dine, he was asked to dine also, but otherwise he and Lady Margaret seldom or never met. She took no notice now of Gerald's mention of him, but rising from her chair, said,

" You will take a cup of tea before you go. Promise, Gerald, to write to me ?"

Gerald refused the cup of tea, but gave the required promise. Then taking both his cousin's hands in his, he pressed his lips upon her forehead, murmured, " God bless you, Margaret," and was gone.

Two hours after, he was at the Victoria Station, amid all the bustle of the departure of the mail train for Dover. The first person he encountered on the platform was his cousin Sidney. The mutual greetings were hurried, " How are you ? All right old fellow ?" and " How are they at Wentmore ? We shall have plenty of time to talk in the train. I must see after this bothering luggage now," was all that passed between them for the first ten minutes. Then having ensconced themselves in a first class carriage, with their wraps and other paraphernalia arranged about them, Gerald exclaimed,

" Thank goodness, we are off at last ! and what a dear good fellow you are to come with me !"

" I would go with you to the other end of the world if you wished it, you know that," responded

the other, and he stretched out his legs and settled his travelling cap more comfortably on his head as he spoke.

"Thanks," said Gerald, laughing. "If ever I contemplate so extended a trip, I will remind you of your offer. Meanwhile, I am grateful to you for seeing me so far as Calais on my way. You go on then to Paris, do you not? and when shall you be back?"

"*Cela dépend,*" was the reply. "I am going to meet Lucas of the —th, at the Hôtel Bristol, and shall stay there as long as he does most likely. In about a fortnight's time I suppose I shall be in London again."

"Now, Sid, tell me about Wentmore. How is my mother? How is Blanche? How are they all going on? and what do they say about me?"

"Well, on the whole, as I told you in my last letter, I found things much better than I expected. Your mother looks very pale and sad, and I fancy has a great deal to go through with Uncle Lennox. Blanche, of course, behaves like an angel, Ferdinand fights your battles like a brick. The one who does not seem very kindly inclined towards you, is our charming cousin, Miss Bibi."

"Bibi!" exclaimed Gerald, "I am surprised at that. She and I were always such great friends."

"Well, all I know is," returned Sidney, "that once or twice when I was speaking to her about you, she expressed herself in pretty strong terms

which were not exactly—what shall we say?—flattering."

"Why, how do you mean? What did she say?" laughed Gerald.

"She was suggesting the probability of your changing your mind again some day, when you had become 'tired of all the mummeries and absurdities of Rome,' as she expressed it, and when I observed that I was morally certain you never would change, and that I had never seen anyone more positively convinced that he had done right than you were, her rejoinder was, 'Just like his obstinacy and conceit.'"

Gerald did not make any reply to this, and after a minute's silence, Sidney looked round at him, and was surprised at the change which had come over his countenance. The smile which was habitually there, and which, when he spoke, lent such a charm to Gerald's face, had died away, and a severely grave expression had settled upon his features.

"Miss Barbara has a bit of a temper, and something had upset her, I suppose," said Sidney. "I should not think anything about it if I were you. What does it signify what she says?"

"I have always looked upon her of late, as my own sister," returned Gerald, sternly, as it was his wont to speak, when stirred by emotion, "and I am sorry that she should so think and so speak of me. Ah! Isn't that Milsom Station?" he

added, as the train dashed past a platform with lights, and he let down the window and leaned out into the air for a minute.

"Yes, I think so. Yes, it must have been," said the other. "Why? what is the matter?"

"Nothing," answered Gerald, putting up the window, and sitting down again.

Milsom was the station for Wentmore. It was the first time he had been so near his home, that home which was so inexpressibly dear to him, since he had brought the sorrow upon its beloved inmates which he would so gladly have averted from them had it been possible. But he knew, and herein was his consolation under that otherwise insupportable thought, that it was *impossible* for him to have prevented the suffering which they must endure in proportion to their love for him, and the sincerity of their own attachment to the Anglican Church. When conversing with the Jesuit Father who had instructed him, and eventually received him into the Catholic Church, Gerald had confessed that it was the thought of his family and their distress which chiefly weighed with him and made him hesitate as to taking the final step. "I perfectly understand your feeling," Father Clifford had said in reply, "it is a most natural, but at the same time, a most dangerous one to entertain. The devil is tempting you through your affections. 'Anything for a delay,' that is what he feels, and remember that on your

decision now, may depend the eternal welfare of those you love so fondly. They are quite as much interested, if they only knew it, in the step you contemplate, as you are yourself. I repeat, upon you and your determination now, their eternal future may depend. If you hesitate and fall back now through any mistaken feeling of love or compassion for them and their momentary sorrow, they may have to reproach you hereafter for their own destruction as well as yours. Let the thought of them and their interests spur you on rather than dissuade you. Your conversion may be, and probably will be, the one chance for each one of them. And do not make so sure of their suffering so much on your account now. Leave them in God's Hands, that is His affair, not yours. He has done much for you in drawing you so near to His Church, and shewing you so plainly His Will. Can you not be a little generous with Him in return? Believe me, my son, the day will come when those you love so deeply, and are thinking of so painfully now, will bless you for your courage in *not* letting your fear of causing them a passing pain, however sharp for the moment, interfere with your resolve to do your Master's bidding at all costs." Thus had the Priest of God argued, and Gerald had felt the truth of his reasoning. The remembrance of his words came back upon him as the train rushed on and bore him further and further from the spot where for a few minutes

he had again breathed, as it were, the same air as those dear ones of whom his thoughts were always so full, and he took comfort to himself by the reflection. "Some day they will thank me for it. Some day they will bless me for what seems my cruelty now."

Sidney, observing that his cousin was disinclined for further conversation, disposed himself for sleep during the remainder of the journey, and Gerald was therefore able to pursue his meditations undisturbed.

The process of collecting tickets at Dover, at length aroused them both effectually, and shortly after, they found themselves steaming out of the harbour, on board the Calais boat. Sidney retired below, and deposited himself on the cabin sofa, "prepared for the worst," as he said, but Gerald preferred remaining on deck.

Although the night was fine, a fresh breeze was blowing, and it seemed likely that they would have a roughish passage, but Gerald was a good sailor, and did not mind that. There were not many other passengers on deck, most of them having gone below. Among the few who were to be seen, however, Gerald noticed one young fellow, who was smoking a cigar, and stopped occasionally as he marched up and down, to say a word or two to one of the sailors as he passed. Something pleasant in the tone of his voice first attracted

Gerald's attention, and he turned round involuntarily to glance at the face of the speaker.

It was a bright young face, and there was an undefinable something about it, and the voice as well, which betokened that both belonged to a gentleman. Gerald took a liking for him immediately. He had rather a habit of taking sudden likes and dislikes for people whom he knew nothing about. A bad habit of which he was fully aware, but could not help.

After a time, when his cigar had come to an end, the youth seemed to tire of his walk, and suddenly seated himself at the end of the bench on which Gerald had stretched his legs, which were muffled up in some mysterious way, and which the other, therefore, had not observed. The natural ejaculations from both parties, resulted in a laughing apology from the stranger, and an instant change of posture on Gerald's part, who begged the young man to remain, as he would not in the least disturb him by doing so. One exchange of courtesies led to another, and in a short time, the two were chatting pleasantly together.

Gerald's new acquaintance appeared to have travelled a good deal, and was now on his way to the South of France. "My people are at Cannes," he said, "and I am going there to join them. Do you know that part of the world?"

"Yes;" answered Gerald. "I was there three years ago for a short time. I thought Cannes

rather dull. Nice is a charming place. Shall you go there at all?"

"I don't know. The sort of rivalry which exists between Cannes, Nice and Mentone is most amusing. Each place has its own especial admirers and frequenters, who will not allow that the other two are to be compared with the one they themselves prefer."

Gerald laughed. "Quite true;" he said.

His new friend went on to speak of Rome and Naples, and Gerald listened eagerly. He had never been to either of those places, and longed now, more than ever, to visit them. "Every Christian should go to Rome, at least once in his lifetime," he had been wont to say in his Anglican days; and as a Catholic, he felt it an absolute duty, as soon as circumstances would permit, to betake himself to the capital of the Catholic world. So interested was he in the conversation, that when the lights of Calais harbour appeared in sight, he felt quite surprised; the passage had seemed so unusually short.

Sidney came tumbling up the cabin stairs.

"How have you been?" he asked. "It has been bad enough down there."

"I have been particularly happy," answered Gerald. "This gentleman and I have been chatting so pleasantly that the time has slipped away surprisingly."

The "gentleman" referred to, laughed, and

said, the passage had certainly appeared a very short one. Then, as the steamer drew up by the side of the quay, they proceeded to collect their various wraps and *et ceteras*, and to fight their way up the narrow gangway leading to the steps above. Of course, they were stopped at the usual point by the inevitable custom-house officer, and had to shew their "*bagages*" and assure the officials they had nothing to "declare," and, of course, they were beset as soon as they appeared on the landing-place, by a crowd of porters and omnibus conductors, eager to convey them and their luggage in any and every direction but the one in which they wanted to go.

"Which hotel do you patronize?" enquired his young *compagnon de voyage*, of Gerald, as they stood for a moment hesitating in the midst of the hubbub and confusion around.

"Dessin's, I think," answered he. "That is the one I have usually slept at when I have stayed here for the night."

"Then we may as well walk, if you do not mind, and I will tell the porter to bring the luggage up after us."

The young man turned round, and in a few words gave the necessary directions to the hotel *employé*, who took possession of their keys, and promised that the things should be up there, almost as soon as they were themselves. Gerald's quick ear apprised him of the fact that his new ac-

quaintance spoke French almost as well as English.

"I wonder whom he can be," he said to Sidney, as they walked on a little way together. "He seems such a nice fellow. I should very much like to know."

"Oh, I daresay he's all right," answered Sidney. "We shall hear at the hotel what his name is. At any rate I am glad he is going on to Paris, as I shall have some one to talk to on the way. I hate travelling by myself, and not knowing a soul."

"I beg your pardon," said the object of their remarks, addressing them both as he overtook them, "but I noticed the name of Lennox on some of your things as they stood together. I have a great friend of that name, I wonder if he is any relation of yours?"

"What is his Christian name?" enquired Gerald. "I am Mr. Lennox, and can soon tell you if he is one of my belongings."

"His name is Ferdinand. His father is the Rector of Wentmore in Southshire. We were at the same College, and have been travelling about together this last summer. In short, we are immense allies," was the answer.

Gerald laughed. "That is my brother," he said, "and I think I must have the pleasure of speaking to Sir George Hamilton, of whom I have very often heard from Ferdinand. Let me introduce my cousin Mr. Graham."

"Well, this is very curious!" exclaimed the

other. "Yes, I am Sir George Hamilton, and I have heard so much of you from your brother, that I feel as if we were old friends. How singular that we should meet in this way! I had a letter from Ferd only yesterday, in which he tells me that you were going abroad. I must write and tell him of this *rencontre* directly. I fancied there was something familiar to me in your voice when you were speaking on board the steamer. Well, this is lucky, I declare!"

"My cousin was just saying how glad he was to think you would be going on to Paris, as you will be able to travel together. Do you make any stay there?" asked Gerald.

"I shall only remain a day or so, on my way through," replied Sir George. "You do not then accompany your cousin?"

"No;" said Gerald. "My plans are very uncertain. I shall remain here a day or two, I think, and then go to Brussels for a short time. There goes the Paris train," he added, as they passed under the old archway, leading from the quay into the town, and a shrill whistle was heard from the direction of the railway station.

Sir George Hamilton turned to Sidney Graham, and began discussing Paris and its attractions with him, and Gerald walked by their side in silence, glad to be left to his own thoughts.

The narrow dimly-lighted streets, the quaint old-fashioned appearance of the houses, and the unmis-

takeably French look about everything which met the eye, impressed upon him the fact that he was now for the first time, treading as a Catholic upon Catholic soil. As they crossed the Grande Place, a neighbouring church clock struck one, and the thought occurred to him, that a few hours later, he might enter that church if he chose, and feel that he had a *right* to be there. Involuntarily, however, he heaved a sigh, as he remembered that the very act which had made him at one with his Catholic brethren all over the world, had cut him off from communion with those who were nearest and dearest to him on earth, and most earnestly he resolved that no efforts should be wanting on his part, to bring them to a knowledge of the One True Faith.

On reaching the hotel, a light supper was ordered, to which the three young men sat down in the *salle à manger*, and Gerald felt glad as soon as it was over to get to his own room. He shook hands warmly with Sir George on saying good night, and they arranged to breakfast together the next morning.

Before he was fairly awake on the following morning, Gerald was roused by a shouting at his door, and recognizing his cousin's voice, he hastily jumped out of bed and opened it.

"I say, Gerald," cried Sidney, bursting into the room in a state of excitement, "here's a pretty go! I've just received a telegram from Robertson."

and Finch, the family lawyers, calling me back to London on important business, and urging me not to lose a moment in my return. What on earth am I to do? What a bore to be sure! Did you ever know anything so disgusting? I suppose I shall have to go back by the early boat to-day. D— the lawyers, what a nuisance they always are!"

"My dear boy, that is a bore," said Gerald, who began hastily to dress. "Let us look at the message. What does it say?"

"Here it is," answered Sidney, taking the formal looking missive out of its large blue envelope, and holding it towards him.

It ran thus :

"MESSRS. ROBERTSON AND FINCH,
Craven St., Strand,
to
SIDNEY GRAHAM, Esq.,
Hotel Dessin. Calais.

"Please return to London at once. It is important that we should see you as soon as possible. Lose no time."

"It certainly looks as if you must go at once," remarked Gerald, as he laid it down. "I am very sorry, but it can't be helped. How did they know where to find you?"

"Oh, I left word at my lodgings, that they were to forward my letters to this house for a day

or two, as I thought you were going to be here. Confound that Robertson, I wonder what the deuce it's about!" And Mr. Graham flung himself out of the room in no very amiable frame of mind.

There was no help for it, however. Sidney vowed that he would not stay one hour in London when he did get there, but would return directly.

"And I shall find you here still, shan't I?" he said to Gerald, as they walked towards the place of embarkation, a little later in the day. They had just seen Sir George Hamilton off in the train for Paris, and it had added to Sidney's wrath that the young baronet should be going on without him.

Gerald assured him that he would remain at Calais till his return. The two cousins went on board together, Sidney carrying a small carpet bag in his hand.

"If I don't come back to-night, I shall tomorrow," he cried, as some ten minutes afterwards the steamer moved slowly from its moorings.

Gerald waved his hand, and remained watching the boat till it was lost to sight. Then with a deep drawn sigh he turned away, and bent his steps in the direction of the ancient Parish Church.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was the Feast of All Saints. High Mass was over, and the good folk of Calais were streaming out of their Parish Church. Amongst them came Gerald, who having wandered all over the town and its environs, and seen the little there was to be seen, had arrived at the conclusion, that the only thing he cared about in the place was this fine old church and its services. He had therefore risen early to attend a Low Mass before breakfast, and had again repaired to the sacred edifice, for the purpose of assisting at the more solemn function later in the day. The morning was fine, but cold, and Gerald walked briskly back towards his hotel, debating in his own mind what he should do with himself during the rest of the day.

Turning to the right as he entered the hotel, he was about to ascend the stairs leading to his room, when a waiter rushed towards him.

"*Un dépêche, Monsieur,*" said he, placing a telegraphic message in Gerald's hand.

It was from Sidney, to say that he was not

coming back, and would write by post. That was all. Gerald went on to his room, threw himself into a chair, and ruminated.

Should he remain where he was any longer? If not, whither should he go?

First of all, it behoved him to consider the state of his finances, and for that purpose he rose up and felt in his travelling bag for the pocket-book which he had carefully put in one corner of it, before starting from town. It contained the greater part of the sum that remained to him, as also letters of introduction and memoranda with regard to his projected movements which he thought it would be as well to consult. But the pocket-book was not there. He looked round the room, on the tables, everywhere for it. He must have removed it from the bag, and put it somewhere else, although he did not remember having done so.

Suddenly, it flashed across him, that he had left it behind in London, in his room at Duke Street. He was certain of it, and did not exactly bless himself for his stupidity. He recollects now, perfectly, taking it from the bag just before starting on the evening he left, and giving his landlady a five pound note out of it. Something had called him out of the room immediately after, and he had thrown the pocket-book into an open drawer which stood close at hand. He must have forgotten to take it out again, and had come away

without it, thinking all the time that it was safe in his bag.

Well, one thing was quite clear. He could go nowhere without money. He must get hold of the pocket-book again at once, and for that purpose he would return to England by the very next boat.

Having come to this conclusion, he jumped up, crammed a few things into a small portmanteau, rang the bell, and gave orders for it to be carried down to the pier.

"I am going to England by the mid-day boat," he said to the astonished waiter, "but I shall take nothing else with me. My other things will remain here, I shall probably return to-morrow."

Sending for his bill, he paid it, requested them to keep his room for him until his return, and then followed by a porter carrying his portmanteau, he hurried down to the steamer.

The train from Paris had not yet come in, but passengers from Brussels and elsewhere were hastening from the station to the boat. Gerald proceeded to establish himself comfortably on deck, and found amusement during the next half hour in watching the people about him. At length the sudden rush from the Railway Terminus which always announces the arrival of the Paris Express, took place, and soon after they moved out of the harbour.

Gerald thought how astonished his cousin Mar-

garet and his brother Ferdinand would be, to say nothing of Sidney Graham who had left him only the day before, on the other side of the channel, if they knew that he was at that moment steaming across it again, in the direction of England. But he could not regret the oversight, provoking as it was, which thus compelled him to retrace his steps in a homeward direction.

The weather was lovely, and his spirits rose in proportion as they neared the opposite coast. He intended to return abroad again the moment he had repossessed himself of the missing pocket-book, but it was pleasant to tread English ground once more, even for so short a time.

When they got to Dover, most of the passengers made a rush for the express train, which was on the point of starting for town, but Gerald walked slowly to the station, knowing that he should have some time to wait there.

Before leaving Calais he had determined to stop at Hillsborough on his way, and either sleep there or go on to London later the same evening. Hillsborough was about ten miles from Wentmore, and as it was not much out of his way, he thought he might indulge himself with a visit to a place he knew so well, and which would bring him within a certain distance of the dear ones at home.

Gerald's feeling about his mother, and sister, and his home altogether, was a peculiar one. He

loved his fond and tender mother, with a love approaching to adoration, and his affection for Blanche was equally strong in its way. Upon those two dear ones, to say nothing of his father and Ferdinand, he had, by his own deliberate act and deed, brought sorrow and suffering, and the thought made him wretched. He longed to be with them, to comfort and soothe them, to assure them again and again how utterly unchanged was his love, how even greater, if possible, it was than before. There was nothing he would not do to console them, save abandoning that faith, the acquisition of which had cost him so dear.

And he was not able to see them,—to say one word, or give one proof of his unchangeable devotion.

The waiting room of the South Eastern Terminal at Dover, is not the most cheerful place in the world in which to pass one's time, but Gerald stretched himself on a sofa, with a couple of newspapers he had bought at the book stall, and made the best of it under the circumstances. Having scanned the "Times," and made himself acquainted with the London news, such as it was, he took up the other paper, which happened to be a local one, and ran his eye over it. He was just about to fling it down, as destitute of interest, when he caught sight of the following paragraph :

"We understand that Mr. Gerald Stewart Lennox, the eldest son of the Rector of Wentmore,

and Lady Frances Lennox, has lately been received into the Church of Rome. This young gentleman, it will be remembered, became possessed of a considerable property on the death of his godfather, the late Sir Gerald Newcome, not long since. The priests have therefore secured a prize, which is the more to be regretted, as the generous liberality of their convert is well known, and we lament that they should obtain the handling of another large fortune."

With an exclamation of anger, Gerald started from his seat, and threw the offending paper from him. "What vile trash! what abominable falsehoods! who on earth can have taken the trouble to invent such lies?" he cried, with such vehemence, that a little girl who was the only other occupant of the waiting room, and who had been gazing at him from a respectful distance, uttered an exclamation of alarm. Gerald turned round and laughed, and the little girl laughed too.

"Did I frighten you?" asked Gerald, apologetically.

"Yes sir, you did for a minute," said the little girl, "but I'm not frightened now;" and she laughed again.

Gerald said he hoped not; and gathering up his papers and other things, he went into the Booking Office to get his ticket. The violent utterance of his indignation had relieved him, and the laugh in which he had joined with the little

girl, had restored his good humour. He still felt annoyed at the publicity given to his conversion by this abominable local print. "But I am not likely to meet anyone I know, so that it does not much signify," he thought, as he took his seat in the train a few minutes later, "and if I do, it does not follow that they will have seen this stupid paper."

"Lennox, is that you?" said a voice from the other end of the carriage. "This is an unexpected pleasure. How are you, my dear fellow?"

Gerald looked up in dismay, and recognized the curate of a neighbouring parish to Wentmore, with whom at one time he had cultivated an intimacy, but of whom he had seen very little of late. He was not exactly overjoyed at meeting him again now, but concealing that fact as well as he could, he grasped the hand which was extended towards him, and enquired how the other had been "getting on," ever since they had last met. The work of Church Restoration was proceeding in Mr. Hayward's parish, and the description of all the improvements actual and projected, occupied some time, during which Gerald played the part of an apparently interested listener. Presently, Mr. Hayward interrupted himself to enquire, "Have you been staying down here at all? Have you seen anything of my friend Stonegate, who has

been doing his church most splendidly at that place of his in Sussex?"

"No. I have not been staying at Dover," answered Gerald, "I have just come over from Calais this afternoon by the boat."

"Oh! indeed. You've been abroad then?"

"Yes, for a short time," was the hasty reply. Gerald did not think it necessary to specify for how short a time, and immediately returned to the subject of Mr. Hayward's church.

"Are there any stained glass windows put in yet?" he asked.

"Two very fine ones," answered Mr. Hayward, eagerly. "I should like you and your brother to see them. We are to have a grand opening soon, and I hope you will both be able to come over. We shall have choral service, and a procession and coloured stoles, and everything first-rate,—quite in your style, you know, so you really must come!"

Gerald coloured up and looked embarrassed for a moment. Then with a little hesitation, he said,

"I daresay my brother will be very happy to come over, if he is at Wentmore, but as regards myself, I fear that your ceremonial will scarcely be in my style after all! You are not aware, perhaps, that I have become a Catholic?"

"A Catholic! a *Roman* Catholic you mean? You don't say so. I beg your pardon, but I am very much astonished."

Gerald however assured him that such was the

case. "I almost wonder that you have not heard it before," he said, "especially as the county paper has got hold of it, and a nice story they have concocted on the subject." Then taking the paper out of his pocket, he gave it to Mr. Hayward, pointing out the paragraph which had so greatly excited his indignation as he did so.

"I am glad to have this opportunity of assuring you how utterly false all that statement is about the Newcome property," he added, "I became possessed of it only on the distinct understanding that if I 'became a Catholic' I was to lose every penny of it, and it has, in fact, all gone to my brother Ferdinand, who will no doubt make a much better use of it than I have done."

Mr. Hayward read the announcement in the paper, and still seemed as if he could scarcely believe it.

"Thank you for telling me that," he said, handing back the paper, "as now I can contradict the statement if I hear it repeated,—but I really am so astonished. You must forgive me, but if anyone had asked me, I should have said from what I knew of you, that you were the last man likely to become a Romanist."

"I think myself, if anyone had asked me some months ago, if I was going to submit to the Roman Catholic Church, I should have indignantly denied the possibility of such a thing," answered Gerald with a smile. "It only shews,"

he added gravely, "that there is hope for all, since the grace of conversion has been accorded to one so unworthy as myself."

Mr. Hayward murmured something about Gerald's well-known excellence which was rather confused, and the stoppage of the train at a station helped to change the subject. Soon after, Gerald got out himself at the Junction for Hillsborough. Taking a cordial leave of his companion, he expressed a hope that they might meet again before long.

"I am not going back to Frodsham for a week or two," said Mr. Hayward, "as my vicar has given me leave of absence, but I shall certainly come over to Wentmore when I do."

For the next half hour, Gerald had to wait at the Junction Station. It was getting dark, it was cold, and the fire in the unluxurious waiting room refused to burn, of course. Some half dozen other people also bound for Hillsborough, were loitering about. One of these, a homely looking farmer, tumbled across Gerald's portmanteau which was standing near him, begged his pardon very earnestly, and took advantage of the circumstance to enter into conversation. He soon ascertained that Gerald was acquainted with the neighbourhood, and put one or two leading questions, with a view to finding out who he was. This, however, he did not succeed in doing, although Gerald could not help smiling at his attempts. The state of

the hops that year, the way in which some had answered and others had failed, was a safe and interesting topic, and to this Gerald mainly confined his remarks. When the train for Hillsborough started, he got into the same carriage with his friend, but the latter was now accompanied by two daughters, neither of whom were very young, or very fair, and who had hitherto maintained a jealous guard over the bad fire in the waiting room. The worthy farmer, however, evidently considered that Gerald's acquaintance was not one to be encouraged under these circumstances. It was all very well for him to talk to young gentlemen with regular features, curling moustaches, and dissolute habits (for, of course, the three attributes naturally went together) when alone, but when he was in charge of his gentle and timid offspring, it was another thing altogether. This he took care that Gerald should understand, and accordingly, having been snubbed once or twice after venturing to make some remark to the old gentleman, Gerald relapsed into silence.

Leaning back in his own corner, he began to ask himself what he should do when he got to Hillsborough. There was no one there he wanted to see, nowhere he wanted to go. What clearly lay before him, was to go on to London and back to Calais again as soon as possible. He was at that moment as near to Wentmore as he could be without leaving the line of rail, and this he was

resolved not to do. The result of his cogitations was, that he determined to go on to London that same night by a later train, and having secured the missing pocket-book, he would take the mail express to Dover in the morning, and return to Calais.

He had scarcely come to this conclusion, when half-a-dozen loud-voiced porters announced the arrival of the train at Hillsborough.

Gerald alighted on the platform, and began to think he had done a foolish thing in coming there at all. He found that another train left for London in an hour's time, but in the meanwhile what should he do with himself? It was dreary work waiting at the station, so leaving his portmanteau in the cloak room, he strolled out of the station, and took the turning beyond it which led in the direction of the Wentmore road. It was quite dark, but for some way the path was lighted by lamps placed at intervals, for the benefit of the dwellers in the suburban villas scattered on either side of the way. The cold air which blew against his cheek was delightful, for it blew straight, he felt, from Wentmore. He was now walking quietly and leisurely along, where that very day the home party might have been, for all he knew to the contrary, as they often drove as far as Hillsborough to shop. On and on he walked, telling himself that each step brought him nearer and nearer to those dear ones. It was something to feel that he

could be with them that very evening if he chose.

"How astonished Mrs. Gregory would be if I was to walk in upon them, just as they were having supper," he thought, smiling to himself. Taking out his watch, he found that it was time for him to return to the station. He had ten minutes to spare when he reached it, and after getting his ticket, he walked up and down the platform to beguile the time.

As he did so, he noticed that each time he passed a bench placed against the wall, on which some intending travellers were seated, a man looked up and seemed to watch him as he walked by. Presently, he stopped short at the book stall, and took up a book which attracted his attention.

"What is the price of this?" he asked of the boy in charge.

The lad looked at the book before answering.

Just then, Gerald perceived that the man he had observed sitting on the bench, was standing beside him. He looked round at him, and felt sure that he had seen his face before, although it had been too dark in the corner where the bench stood, for him to have distinguished his features when he sat there.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Gerald," said the man, smiling, and touching his hat, "but I was certain it was you, sir. I hope you are quite well, sir? and all the family?"

Gerald instantly recognized the voice as that of

an old servant of his father's, who had lived at Wentmore as coachman, and having married one of the housemaids, had gone to settle down at Hillsborough in some small line of business.

"Is that you, Rogers?" he cried, shaking him by the hand. "I thought I knew your voice. How are you? and how is Mrs. Rogers? I did not expect to see you here."

"Quite well, thank you, sir," answered the man, grinning with delight. "She is here, sir, but did not like to make so bold as to come forward, but I said if it was you, I knew you would be glad to see us, and that I should take the liberty of speaking if she didn't. I will go and fetch her, sir."

"Do so," said Gerald; "and make haste as we haven't much time to spare."

Then paying the boy for the book, he put it in his pocket, and walked towards the carriage in which he had already placed his wraps. Mr. Rogers and his wife came bustling up as he stood waiting for them by the door, and during the minute or two that elapsed before the final signal for starting was given, he had to give repeated assurances of the well doing of all at the Rectory, and in return was informed that they were "*That* pleased they had chanced to be at the station that night, having come to see a friend off who was going by the same train. And if Mr. Gerald was going to Wentmore, would he be so good as

to give their duty and respects, and remember them to Mrs. Statham, and—”

The guard cut short the number of messages Mr. Gerald was to take to all their Wentmore friends from the worthy pair, and that young gentleman had to jump into his carriage hurriedly, the train being almost on the move as he did so. Leaning out of the window, he waved his hand to his humble friends who stood bowing and smiling on the platform, and then as the train passed beneath an archway, and hid them from sight, he threw himself back on the seat, and reflected rather bitterly on the length of time that was likely to elapse before he took any messages himself to Wentmore. “How little they know,” he thought, “how amazed and petrified they would be if anyone told them that Mr. Gerald had turned ‘Roman,’ and no longer went to the dear old church with the rest of the family, and at that moment was not even allowed to go near them at all! Ha, well, they will know it, and so will everyone else in time, and it does not much signify what they think, poor things.”

Whether something had gone wrong, or had been forgotten, or what it was, he did not know; but just then the train slackened its pace, finally stopped, and then pushed back into the station from which it had so lately emerged. They were not delayed there more than two minutes, and then started again, but Gerald had time to observe

that Mr. and Mrs. Rogers were still standing where he had left them, and that they had been joined by a third person, a tradesman, Gerald imagined by his appearance, who held a newspaper in his hand, and was gesticulating vehemently, pointing to the carriage where he sat, and striking the paper he held with his other hand as he did so. Gerald caught sight of the scared look on the faces of the honest couple, and it flashed across him in a moment, that by means of that newspaper they had become acquainted with his conversion. Doubtless, in talking to this other man, whoever he was, (probably some neighbour or acquaintance in the town who had joined them after the departure of the train,) Rogers had mentioned their late encounter with himself, and the other hearing his name, had naturally alluded to the paragraph in that abominable paper, and called their attention to it.

He understood it all ; the virtuous indignation of the Protestant tradesman, the stupefaction and dismay of the warm-hearted Rogers and his wife. He could almost imagine he heard their astonished remonstrances and suggestions as to there being some mistake, as to the possibility of its being some other Mr. Lennox, whom the newspaper people had confounded with the Wentmore family, and he comprehended perfectly the gesture of their informant as he pointed to the train, and assured them it was certainly himself.

But they were again speeding on their way, and as the lights faded in the distance, other thoughts took possession of him, and he ceased to trouble himself about the newspaper paragraph, and whether people believed it or whether they did not. Each station they passed served to call some familiar spot to mind. Each one was more or less within reach of Wentmore, and when the train moved on after waiting a few minutes at one of the nearest, he got up, and leaning out of the window into the darkness, said, "Goodbye, goodbye," as though they could hear him ten miles off, and as if he had been taking leave of his old life, its scenes and all connected with it for ever. Then he threw himself on the seat again, closed his eyes, and tried to sleep. But it was of no use. He could do nothing but think.

It suddenly occurred to him that the next day was All Souls'; his first All Souls' Day as a Catholic, and the solemn Office for the Dead had been sung in all the churches that very night, succeeding the jubilant Vespers of All Saints, ere the sound of the latter had ceased to fall upon the ear. And he was passing the hours on the railway, instead of joining in the services of the Church!

Nevertheless, if he was not with his co-religionists in body, he could unite with them in spirit, and he felt in his pocket for a small prayer-book he carried about with him, and which contained

sundry prayers for the dead. He thought it was in the pocket of the coat he had on, but he could not find it. Then, taking up an overcoat which he had brought with him, but which he seldom wore, he examined it to see if by any chance he had slipped the book in there instead. Yes, he felt something about that size low down in the breast-pocket of this overcoat. He pulled it out, held it up towards the lamp which lighted the carriage, and uttered an exclamation of surprise! It was not his prayer-book, (which he saw the next moment lying on the seat beside him,) but *it was his lost pocket-book*. The very one in search of which he had come all the way from Calais, and was now speeding up to London!

He saw it all in a moment. That was the coat he had on when he started from town two days before, he had never worn it since, and had never thought of searching in it for the missing article. No doubt he had taken the pocket-book out of the drawer into which he had thrown it just before his departure, and then dropped it into this pocket, where it had been ever since. If he had only examined this coat a little sooner, he might have spared himself all the extra expense and trouble of this journey, but after all, he did not much regret it, for he had enjoyed it on the whole, and if it had not been for the lost pocket-book, he would not have had an excuse for making it. So, glancing over its contents to see that all was as it:

should be, he placed it safely under lock and key in his travelling bag, and rather congratulated himself on not having found it sooner. Of course there was now no occasion for his going to his lodgings at the West End. He would get a bed at the nearest hotel on his arrival at London Bridge, and return to Dover as he had already determined, by the mail train in the morning.

It seemed almost impossible to believe, when the noise and bustle and glare of the London Bridge Station announced their arrival, that he had only left that same London two days before. He felt as if he had been travelling about for ages, and as if he was scarcely the same Gerald Lennox who had started from the West End on the Tuesday evening before (this was Thursday) by the mail train for Dover, with no idea of re-visiting the smoky English capital for at least some months to come. As he was to depart so early in the morning again, he told a porter to follow him with his portmanteau to the Terminus Hotel close by, and proceeded at once to engage a room there, and to get something to eat. He was tired, and did not care to go further than was necessary in search of such accommodation as he needed, and as he had often heard the hotel well spoken-of, he thought this was a good opportunity for testing its qualifications.

The young lady who "kept the books" and presided at the mysterious looking window, just inside

the principal entrance, desired a waiter to carry the gentleman's luggage to No. 67, and Gerald proceeded to follow it upstairs.

He had not gone many yards, however, when the young lady called him back.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but what name shall I say?"

He stopped and hesitated a moment. Something possessed him not to give his real name.

"Stewart," he said, "Mr. Stewart;" and went on up the stairs to his room.

After all, Stewart was his name, at least, it was one of his names, and what did it signify what name she stuck down in her book?

How much it signified he little knew; or what important results were to flow in the future, from this little fancy of his!

The young lady did not catch the name. She again repeated her query.

"*Stewart*;" shouted the waiter, who was carrying the portmanteau, answering on Gerald's behalf.

Gerald coloured up involuntarily, and smiled to himself as he went forward to take possession of number Sixty-Seven.

Presently, he descended to the coffee-room, but did not linger long over his repast there, and feeling very tired, was glad to get to bed. His room was on the side furthest from the station, and he was less disturbed by noise than he would otherwise have been.

It seemed still the middle of the night, when the waiter, thundering at his door, woke him, and told him it was six o'clock, the time he had desired to be called.

An hour or so later, the train was bearing him at express speed once more towards the channel. When they were fairly among the fields and hedge-rows again, Gerald let down the window, and as he looked out over the bright smiling prospect, he could not help thinking with a sigh, of how long it might be before he should see that fair English landscape again !

Immediately on landing at Calais, he hurried to Dessin's. In answer to his enquiries, he was told that there was a letter for him, which a waiter hastened to produce.

It was in Sidney's hand-writing. He tore it open.

"I am off to Scotland, the old General is ill," Sidney wrote, "and the governor will have it that I go down to him. R. and F. knew I shouldn't come if they told me for what I was wanted, so they got me over in the rascally way they did. Send my traps back to Jermyn Street, and tell me where to write to you. Yours ever, SID."

The "old General" was a cousin of Sidney's father, and the head of their family. Gerald knew that his uncle entertained expectations in that quarter, and understood his anxiety that his son should be with the old man if he was ill and

wished for him, and he thought Messrs. Robertson and Finch had shewn their discretion in sending for the young gentleman as they had done.

Ringing the bell, Gerald announced his own intention of leaving that night by the train for Brussels, and gave the necessary directions for forwarding Sidney's luggage. Then lighting a cigar, he strolled out into the town, and spent the rest of the day in wandering about by the water side, and visiting the old parish church. "*C'est un Monsieur Anglais, qui est si dévot,*" the old women said to each other with wondering admiration, as they followed him with their eyes when he left his chair and walked towards the church door after the evening Salut was over, and their admiration increased on hearing him drop a liberal alms into the poor-box as he passed out of the porch. "*Prions nous le bon Dieu pour lui.*"

That was the last they saw of Gerald. He spent the rest of the evening reading over the fire in his room, and soon after midnight started by train for Brussels.

CHAPTER IX.

GERALD's reminiscences of the Belgian capital were vague. He had been there once before with his father and mother, when he was ten years old, and still retained a dim recollection of the long narrow street leading into the old town from the Place Royale, as also of one or two ancient gothic churches, which at the time had been decorated with evergreens and flowers for some religious Fête, and had therefore impressed themselves upon his childish memory. But now, when he looked out of the window, as he was slowly dragged up the hill from the Station du Nord towards the Boulevards, in a one horse *vigilante*, the aspect of the place in the cold grey of a November morning, did not strike him as inviting. As far as he could be said to have formed any plans at all, he had decided upon remaining at Brussels during the cold weather. He wished to live as economically as possible, and was still resolute in

his purpose of seeking employment at one of the colleges if he could hear of an opening, which was likely to suit him. Father Clifford had given him an introduction to the Abbé Beaufort, a friend of his, who lived in the Quartier Louise, and also a letter to the Superior of the Jesuits in the Rue Royale. He knew there were one or two English families whose acquaintance he could easily make if he chose, but he did not care much about English society abroad ; he wanted to know a few good Belgian Catholics, and he hoped to get introduced to some of these through his clerical friends. But the grand attractions of Brussels were the churches and the services, above all, that glorious St. Gudule, of which he had heard so much and so often. He longed to find himself worshipping within its walls, and he determined as soon as he had settled himself and had some breakfast, that he would sally forth and have a good exploring ramble about the town. He intended to engage lodgings, if he could find any cheap ones, in a good situation, and meanwhile had desired the driver to take him to a private English Hotel, to which he had been recommended in the Rue de Trône.

The day proved itself clear and fine, and Gerald set off on his reconnoitering expedition some two hours after his arrival, with a lighter feeling at his heart than he had experienced for some time. Before leaving his room at the private hotel, where

he had established himself for the moment very comfortably, he had written three letters for the English post, one to Ferdinand, one to his cousin Lady Margaret, and one to his cousin Sidney. He placed these in his pocket, deciding to put them himself into the box at the Principal Post Office.

Passing from the Rue de Trône into the Boulevards, he crossed over into the Rue de Namur, and so descended into the Place Royale. This was the only part of the town he entertained any remembrance of, and that was but of a shadowy kind. The steep and narrow Montagne de la Cour he recollects driving down with Lady Frances in an open carriage, on the occasion of that former visit, to which we have referred, and the general aspect of the place appeared to him more or less familiar as he looked about.

Stopping at the corner of the Place, he turned round to admire the equestrian statue of Godfroi de Bouillon, and the noble façade of the Eglise St. Jacques, to the interior of which he promised himself a visit another time, and then sauntered slowly down the street, pausing to look in at the shop windows from time to time, and noting with a smile what a contrast everything afforded to the turmoil and confusion of the streets of London. There were as many persons walking in the roadway as on the pavement, the entire absence of omnibuses and the comparatively small number of

vehicles of any description, rendering it quite easy for them to do so. The numbers of well-dressed English people he passed, astonished him at first, but he soon got accustomed to the sight of his *compatriotes*, and only wondered if he should meet anyone he knew. The door of the little church of the Madeleine was open as he passed, and he went in to look at it. There was not much to see, but the figure of the Magdalen at the foot of the cross, and the devotional aspect of the place altogether struck him forcibly. After kneeling a few moments before the altar, he walked quietly round the building, and then resumed his ramble. Turning to the left, he presently found himself in the Grande Place, with its mediæval-looking houses and its magnificent Hotel de Ville which was then undergoing repair. There was the spot where Egmont and Horne had been executed,—there was the house in which Margaret of Austria had lived. The place seemed crowded with historical reminiscences, and Gerald felt an admiration akin to awe as he walked slowly round it. Continuing his way down the Rue de la Montagne towards the Post Office, he at last arrived in front of St. Gudule, and then standing in the outer vestibule of a house, exactly opposite the grand western entrance, he remained with his arms folded, literally lost in amazement and delight. The midday Angelus had already rung out, and so for some little time the church was closed, but he was in-

formed by a civil shopwoman on whose domain he was trespassing, that there was Benediction at five o'clock, and he determined to attend the service when he would hear the singing and see the interior, both of which he was impatient to do, at the same time.

The Post Office was close by, and having deposited his letters, he found his way to the Park, and walked up and down its broad avenues for some time, regretting that he had not seen them in all the luxuriance of their summer foliage. Then feeling hungry, he turned into a restaurant and got some luncheon, after which he bethought himself of his note of introduction to M. l'Abbé Beaufort, and set off to deliver it.

The Boulevard de Waterloo (which was the address on the note,) he had no difficulty in finding, and upon enquiry at the number indicated, he was informed that M. l'Abbé was not at home, but was expected in shortly, by the damsel who opened the door. Gerald left the note and said, he would call again presently. Meanwhile, he proceeded to take a turn up and down the Boulevard.

Nearly opposite the Abbé's house was a large and imposing-looking structure, which a passer-by informed him was the Church of the Carmelite Fathers, who had a monastery close by. As usual in Catholic countries, the door of the sacred building was open, and Gerald ascending the

steps which led to it, passed in at the side entrance.

It was a large, and as regarded detail, unfinished-looking edifice, but he observed in this, as in other churches connected with the Religious Orders, wherever he met with them, a nicety and seemliness about all the arrangements, the absence of which often struck him painfully, in what might be called the "secular" churches. There were only three altars, and these of the simplest kind. The high altar was ornamented by six massive brass candlesticks, and a large crucifix surmounted the tabernacle in the centre. The two side altars were in honour of our Lady of Mount Carmel, and of the Sacred Heart respectively. A handsome image of St. Joseph was placed on one side of the sanctuary, and others of St. Teresa, St. Anne, and St. John of the Cross, stood in various parts of the building. The pulpit was a small and evidently temporary wooden one, the confessionals were also of wood and of the plainest kind.

Gerald took in all these features of a spot which was afterwards to become equally familiar and dear to him, at a glance. A small notice board affixed to the north wall, presently attracted his attention. It was close to a bell, and notified how many times persons needing a confessor should pull the same to signify which of the fathers was wanted. It appeared that some heard confessions in French and German, others in Flemish only.

others in all three languages. But what instantly caught Gerald's eye, was the information in English, that anyone requiring an English confessor was to pull the bell three times, which would summon the Rev. Father Anselm who received confessions in that tongue. He was reading this with interest, and was about to pull the bell accordingly, when some one close by, said to him in a low voice, "You are English?" and turning, he beheld one of the Fathers standing beside him, and watching him with a kindly smile.

"I am;" answered Gerald, in the same low tone, "and you are Father Anselm?"

The monk bowed in acquiescence.

"Will you hear my confession, father?"

"My confessional is on the other side of the church, Monsieur. If you will place yourself there, I will be with you directly."

Then bowing once more gravely, and folding his arms below his brown scapular, the father passed on through the gate of the low sanctuary rail, and through a door beyond which led into the sacristy.

Gerald had not to wait long in the confessional, which he soon found on the south side of the church, and when his confession was over, he asked what time Father Anselm was most at liberty, and could best see him if he called at the monastery.

"Between twelve and one, my son," answered the monk, "but I shall be most happy to see

you at any time. Do you remain long in Brussels?"

"I am uncertain at present, father," said Gerald, "but shall most likely do so until the spring." Then desiring his prayers and again thanking him, Gerald rose and left the church.

As he walked back towards the Abbé Beaufort's, he felt as if he knew for the first time what it was to be a Catholic. Here he was in a foreign city, a perfect stranger, only just arrived, and he had found a friend and father already, in this church which he had entered by mere accident, owing simply to the fact of his being at one with the Catholic Church throughout the world, and entitled to a share in all its privileges and blessings. "Oh!" he thought, "who would not be a Catholic, if they only knew how incalculable was the gain!"

This time the Abbé Beaufort was at home, and Gerald was shewn into a parlour on the ground floor where two gentlemen were sitting, one of whom a little man, who by his ecclesiastical attire, Gerald perceived was the Abbé, rose immediately on his entrance, and advanced towards him.

"Meester Lennox, I am vera glad to see you," he said, holding out his hand. "I hope, sare, you arre quite well. Let me introduce you to our good friend, Meester Fitzroy, who was just doing me the pleasure of a veesit."

The other gentleman arose and bowed, and Gerald soon found himself engaged in pleasant conversation with the two. Mr. Fitzroy was a tall, fine-looking Englishman, about fifty-five or fifty-six years of age. He was delighted to make Gerald's acquaintance; he knew his name very well, and had been in the same regiment with his uncle, Captain Lennox, in former years. He was himself a resident in Brussels, and if Gerald needed a cicerone, he should be only too happy to shew him anything there was to be seen, etc., etc.

Gerald was extremely obliged, and assured him he would with pleasure accept his kind offer, but what he wanted particularly to know, he said, was about the churches and services, which were the best worth seeing and attending, and this he had no doubt M. l'Abbé would be good enough to put him up to.

"Ste. Gudule, of course, he had seen?" the Abbé hastened to enquire with *empressement*. "No? that, then, was the firrst thing! And the singing—you will be deelighted, *mon cher!* Thees is Saturday. There is Salut at five o'clock. Ah! you know that? You should on no account mees it. Some of the old churches were vera fine, but the Revolution, *ah! la Revolution!* that destroyed so much! Notre Dame de Sablon, was one of the oldest, and they were restoring it vera nicely. Did he know M. le Curé? M. le Curé spoke

Engleesh, vera good man. Notre Dame de la Chapelle, also vera nice church. The Carmelites opposite. Ah, he had already seen that ? would be nice church, but was nothing at present, only lately built, Fathers were vera poor, but ah good ! so good !. The Eglise St. Jacques and the Eglise Ste. Marie at each end of the Rue Royale, they were worth visiting. The latter was a memorial to the late Queen Louise, a good Catholique, and vera lamented. St. Joseph and St. Boniface in the new part of the town, Meester Lennox must see them, and the new church the Jesuit Fathers were about to open in the Rue Royale near the Jardin Botanique, and the Chapelle Expiatoire in the Rue des Sols, where there was Exposition *chaque jours !*"

In this way the good Abbé rattled on, his broken English lending an emphasis to his words, which together with his energetic manner, amused Gerald excessively. He thanked him very much, especially for a list of the hours of evening Salut at the different churches where it was sung daily, which the Abbé gave him. Then as Mr. Fitzroy was going the same way, they rose and took leave together.

As they walked slowly down the Boulevard towards the Rue de Trône, Mr. Fitzroy touched upon the subject of Gerald's conversion, which interested him greatly. It was so astonishing, he said, to think of a Lennox as a Catholic. He

remembered once when staying with his uncle Geoffrey, seeing old Mr. Lennox, Gerald's grandfather, who was a Tory of the old school, and looked upon the Pope as a far more objectionable member of society than a cut-throat or pick-pocket would be.

"But," added Mr. Fitzroy, as they arrived at the door of Gerald's hotel, "one hears of so many conversions now, in the most unexpected quarters, that nothing ought to astonish one." Then giving Gerald his address, and expressing a hope that they might see a good deal of each other, he shook hands with him and walked away.

That evening, as Gerald left St. Gudule, when the Salut was over, and took his way slowly home-wards, he felt quite happy. The solemn service in which he had been engaged, the sweet sound of the music which still vibrated in his ears, the beautiful singing which seemed like angels' voices, dying away through the vaulted arches and aisles of the grand old church, elevated and soothed his spirit at the same time, and now that he had formed two or three acquaintances, he no longer felt such a stranger in the place. "If I could only have Ferdinand with me for a little while, I should be perfectly satisfied," he said to himself.

But when he sat over his fire that night, before going to bed, having informed the landlord of his intention of departing on the Monday, in order to

take possession of some lodgings he had seen and engaged that afternoon, he remembered the unsatisfactory state of his finances, and a feeling of melancholy and gloom stole over him. The sum of ready money in his possession, although sufficient for his present wants, was sensibly diminishing. His late excursion from Calais to London and back, had helped considerably to reduce the amount he had started with, and his prospects altogether, at that moment, were not exactly brilliant.

The Abbé Beaufort had touched upon the subject of the professorship, as they stood at the door for a minute when Gerald was leaving his house, and had given it as his opinion that there was little chance of his being able to meet with anything of the kind just at present, but he had promised to enquire and let him know if he heard of anything. His determination not to touch another farthing of Sir Gerald's money, was as firm as ever, but he could not help feeling that this determination was likely to cost him dear, and come what would, he was equally resolved not to ask his father, or Lord Norwood for help, if they did not volunteer it themselves. Altogether, Gerald Lennox felt weary and out of spirits, when he laid his head on his pillow at the end of this his first day in Brussels, and very different from what he had done a few hours before, when coming out of St. Gudule.

But so it had ever been with him. One while,

buoyed up with hope and gladness, feeling as if his walk through life was to be one of perpetual sunshine, and another, cast down and low, because all had not gone as smoothly with him as he expected. This variableness is the bane of excitable natures ; it may render them more interesting in the eyes of others, but it is a veritable misfortune to the sufferers themselves.

The next day was Sunday, and Gerald rose early to attend a Low Mass at the Redemptorists' Church, which was not far from his hotel. After breakfast, he walked down to St. Jacques for the High Mass which began at ten o'clock ; the singing was good, and he enjoyed the sermon in French by a Capuchin Father, whose name he had heard mentioned as a good preacher.

In the afternoon, he called upon Mr. Fitzroy, and went with him to St. Gudule for the five o'clock service. Mr. Fitzroy had an engagement which obliged him to take leave of Gerald when they left the church, and the evening being fine, the latter wandered about the streets for some time before returning home. The numbers of people about, and the utterly un-English look of everything on a Sunday, although he had often been abroad, and noticed the same thing before, served to amuse him and divert his thoughts for a while from the future, the contemplation of which now filled him with melancholy. At eight o'clock he returned home to dinner, after which

he took up a book and read himself to sleep over the fire.

Two letters, addressed *Poste Restante*, were handed to him the next day, when he inquired if there were any for him at the Principal Office. He glanced at the writing. One was from Sidney with a black-edged border. "To announce the old General's death," he said to himself, as he placed it in his pocket, intending to open it more at his leisure. The other was a business one from the look of it. He knew the hand as that of his banker's clerk. "To tell me of some late payment to my account. They might have spared themselves the trouble, or had better have written to Ferdinand. I shall certainly not open that at present," he thought, and slipped it after the other into his breast pocket.

It was a dull, cold morning, and he had walked briskly down from the lodgings into which he had removed immediately after breakfast. His walk, and the excitement of moving into his new quarters, had raised his spirits again, and he felt less despondent about the future. For the next hour or so, he perambulated the streets, rendering himself familiar with the geography of the place, and stopping every now and then before some window where religious statuary and other ecclesiastical objects were exposed to view, to admire or criticize as the case might be.

The pictures in the Montagne de la Cour riveted

his attention for a long time, and he was tempted in to ask the price of several choice engravings, one or two of which he could not resist purchasing. Gerald had always cherished a deep attachment for the memory of Marie Antoinette, and anything connected with her, possessed an irresistible charm for him. All prudential considerations therefore vanished straightway when the shopman produced from a portfolio, a magnificent full length portrait of the unfortunate Queen, and held it up invitingly before him. He was just turning to leave the shop, but this was sufficient to chain him for at least another ten minutes to the spot. The man urged the merits of the engraving, and the desirability of Monsieur, who evidently had a refined taste, securing it at once. They were in such excessive demand that the one or two copies they had left would certainly be gone, if Monsieur did not possess himself of this one at once. Gerald hesitated.

"What was the price?"

"Sixty francs. It was through purely accidental and fortuitous circumstances that they were able to offer them at such a low figure."

Sixty francs! Gerald did not like to think what a hole that would make in his purse, but the bait was too tempting. "Well, I will have it," he said hastily, and the man bowing and smiling, proceeded to place the Marie Antoinette with the other purchases Monsieur had made.

Gerald then hastily left the shop, having desired the parcel to be sent to his lodgings as soon as possible. He walked with rapid strides across the Place Royale, trying to convince himself that he had not been dreadfully extravagant, in which endeavour, however, he was not wholly successful. Just as he gained the centre of the Place, his progress was arrested by a small concourse of persons who were standing, the men with their heads uncovered, and the women in attitudes of devotion, facing the church of St. Jacques. At the same moment, the sound of a tinkling bell met his ear, and down the steps of the sacred edifice he saw a priest descending with the Blessed Sacrament, borne under a canopy, and preceded by two boys carrying lighted tapers, whilst a third rang a bell continuously as they advanced.

It was the Viaticum being carried to some sick person.

Gerald instantly took off his hat, and then as the Sacred Host approached, reverently bent his knee and remained in a posture of adoration until It had passed. He did not notice whether others did the same, or whether he was rendering himself in any way conspicuous by the act. Several old men and women of the poorer sort were kneeling beside him, and the better dressed part of the community who chanced to be near, stood with their hats removed whilst the little procession

passed, but some of these as they did so, glanced with surprise at the English-looking gentleman who was so reverent and devout.

As Gerald rose and replaced his hat on his head, he drew back to allow some ladies who were standing behind him, to pass in a contrary direction to that in which he was going himself. As he did so, he was surprised and annoyed at the gaze of wonder and curiosity they bestowed upon him, as if they considered him something very out-of-the-way and extraordinary indeed. They were unmistakably English, but if he had entertained any doubt on the subject, it was removed by hearing one observe to another, before he had time to take more than a step out of their way, "I am sure he is English, and a Catholic."

What more was added he did not know, but the colour flew to his face, and he thought somewhat bitterly to himself, "They are surprised at seeing one of their fellow-countrymen behave like a Christian in a Christian country, I daresay." In another minute he was overtaken by an old beggar-woman, who had had her eye upon him for some time, and evidently considered him a lawful prey. Gerald looked at her savagely without stopping, and shook his head. Then, as she said something in an imploring tone, he relented and felt in his pocket for a couple of sous, which he put into her hand, muttering, "*Pour l'amour du Saint Sacre-*

ment," and then hurried on without waiting for her thanks and benison.

When he got home, he threw himself into a chair, and his letters upon the table. Then taking up the one from Sidney, he tore it open and read as follows :

" St. Andrew's Crescent,

" Edinburgh, November 3, 186-

" MY DEAR GERALD,

" I was too late to see the old General alive. When I got to Stone House, he had been dead some hours. This upset me very much as you may suppose. The old man was always kind to me, although he and my father did not get on very well together. But I have worse news to tell you than this. I had scarcely been there an hour when a messenger arrived from the housekeeper here, to say my father was very ill, and begged me to come to him immediately. They knew I should be at the General's, Robertson and Finch having sent them word that I had started from London for his place. As there was nothing to detain me there, I left the servants, who were old and attached, in charge, and came here at once. I am sorry to say I found my father very ill, so ill that the doctors give me but little hope of his recovery. He knew me, and seemed pleased to think I had done as he wished, and

gone to the General's. It appears that the old fellow wrote to him a sort of 'make-up' letter when he was first taken ill, and expressed a wish to let byegones be byegones, and if he could not come to him himself, he hoped the governor would send me. My father was not well enough to go himself, and so they telegraphed for me as you know. I am glad I came, as the governor is really very ill, and it would have vexed me to have been in Paris or away from him just now. I can't do much, but he likes me to go and sit with him every now and then, and I take any little bit of news I am able to pick up in the town to amuse him. How are you, and how are you getting on? I send this to *Poste Restante*, Brussels, as the most likely address to find you. Write soon. Your affectionate cousin,

SID."

And then followed a P.S., written evidently in haste and agitation.

"Dear G., I am in great trouble, my father is dying. Let them know at Wentmore. I am very unhappy. Yours, S."

Gerald jumped up and paced the room with agitated strides. "Poor fellow! poor Sid! How very sad for him!" he exclaimed, and then read the postscript of the letter over again. Leaning against the chimney-piece and gazing into the fire,

he repeated to himself, “Poor, poor fellow! I must write to him directly.”

His eye just then fell on the other letter, which lay on the table, and seizing it hastily, he tore off the cover which he threw into the fire, and unfolded the square business-like epistle. It was from his London Bankers. He saw that at a glance, and read one or two lines without taking in their meaning, for his thoughts were elsewhere, and he was dwelling mournfully upon his cousin’s trouble in Scotland. Suddenly, however, a sentence at which he was gazing in a kind of vacant way, fixed his attention, and he read it a second time with a start. Then beginning the letter again, he perused it attentively through, pausing over some portions of it in order to understand them thoroughly. Then sinking slowly back into his chair, whilst the colour mounted to his brow, he held the letter from him at arm’s length, and exclaimed, “What can this mean?”

It was indeed a startling communication. He had, only a few hours before, been meditating sorrowfully upon his pecuniary prospects, and here was a letter from the firm with which during his enjoyment of the Newcome property he had been accustomed to bank, informing him, “That a sum of five thousand pounds had been placed to his account, and that he was at liberty to draw upon them for that amount whenever he pleased, and they were requested to state that this payment

had nothing whatever to do with the monies hitherto received by them on his behalf from the trustees and executors of the late Sir Gerald Newcome. They were instructed by Mr. Ferdinand Lennox to honour any draft he (Mr. Gerald Lennox) might think fit to present upon that same annual payment of one thousand pounds as heretofore, but this lodgment of £5000 was altogether a separate matter, and in no way connected with the other. The party making the payment wished the donor's name not to appear. Mr. Gerald Lennox must understand that the money was entirely at his disposal, and would remain so, whether he chose to make immediate use of it or not. And they begged to remain, etc., etc., etc."

Surprise and pleasure were the dominant sentiments which possessed him as he read and re-read the letter, but another kind of feeling soon stole over him. It was one of pride and dislike at the thought of being placed under such an obligation by any person unknown to himself. Unless he might be told to whom he was indebted for this timely and generous assistance, he would not avail himself of it, at any rate he would only take what was absolutely necessary and no more. The first thing, of course, was to acknowledge the receipt of the epistle, and after that he would consider what next was to be done.

Accordingly, he wrote a letter to the Bankers, thanking them for the communication which had

astonished him so much, begging them, if possible, to give him an idea as to the quarter from whence so unexpected a donation had come, and expressing his reluctance to avail himself of it whilst he remained in ignorance on that point. He then penned a few lines of affectionate sympathy to Sidney Graham, and hurried off to the General Post Office in order that he might be in time for the afternoon mail to England.

That same evening, he wrote to Ferdinand, (from whom the bankers had doubtless obtained a clue as to his whereabouts,) apprising him of the news contained in both the letters he had received that morning. In due course, answers were returned both from Oxford and London. His brother could not solve the mystery of the payment at the bank, but he expressed his delight at Gerald's good fortune, and hoped that he would not be so foolish as to allow any mistaken delicacy or scruples to interfere with his taking advantage of so opportune a windfall. He had written to Sidney, he said, but feared from Gerald's account that there could be but little hope of their uncle's life. The banker's letter was a very civil one, but they were unable, without permission, to reveal the name of the party by whom the payment of which they had informed Mr. Lennox, had been made. So for the present the matter ended, and Gerald felt after his late anticipations of poverty,

as if he had suddenly become a millionaire in spite of himself.

Letters also came to him from Wentmore in answer to a few lines he had written to his father, announcing his arrival at Brussels, and telling him, as Sidney had requested, of Mr. Graham's serious illness. Lady Frances and Blanche wrote long affectionate letters, full of anxiety to know how he was, and whether he was perfectly happy. His mother sent him a note of introduction to the English Ambassadress who had been a friend of hers in early youth. "She will not remember me I daresay," Lady Frances wrote, "but she will not have forgotten my father and mother who were very fond of her, and often had her at their house after her own mother died. You should also know Lady Sophia Roberts, who is living at Brussels with her son and daughters. They are Roman Catholics and you would get on with them. The son must be about your own age," etc.

Gerald had heard Mr. Fitzroy mention the Robertses as being an English Catholic family residing in his neighbourhood, and he resolved to make their acquaintance at the earliest opportunity. He felt very much in want of a companion of his own age, and a Catholic one would be doubly agreeable. At present, Mr. Fitzroy was the only Englishman he knew in Brussels, and although he liked him very much, and they got on very well together, still there was a disparity

in years, and Mr. Fitzroy as a resident of some standing in the town, had his fixed hours and occupations, which prevented him from being at Gerald's disposal as often as the latter could have wished. He had introduced Gerald to the English club and reading-room on the Boulevard, where all the English and local papers were to be seen, and Gerald's name had been put down as an honorary member for a certain length of time.

One afternoon, about ten days after his arrival, during which time he had not heard again from Sidney, he strolled into the club, and took up the *Times* which had just arrived, and was not in immediate demand, the only other person in the room being a Belgian gentleman, who was looking at the *Indépendance*. Gerald glanced down the list of Deaths, and read the following announcement.

“On the 4th inst., at his residence, No. 6, St. Andrew’s Crescent, Edinburgh, Francis Graham Esq., late of the Hon. E. I. C. Civil Service, in the 69th year of his age.”

Sidney’s letter had been dated, the 3rd. His father, then, had died the next day. Gerald threw down the paper, and hurried home at once, to write a line of condolence to his cousin.

“How sad it must be for him! How lonely he must feel now, poor fellow!” he said to himself as he walked along.

A *vigilante* was drawn up in front of his lodg-

ings, and luggage was being removed from it into the house. Someone had apparently just arrived. The door was open, and a gentleman was standing in the passage with the landlady and the driver.

"*Ah! Voila Monsieur!*" cried the landlady, as she caught sight of Gerald's form in the doorway.

The gentleman turned round.

"That's all right, then," he said. It was Sidney Graham.

CHAPTER X.

THERE was a tea-fight at Mrs. Gregory's. Christmas was at hand, and the old lady liked to surround herself during the long winter evenings with young and happy faces. The party on this occasion included the two young ladies from the Rectory, Clara and Minnie Smith, Mr. Woods, and Mr. Hayward, the curate of Frodsham. Mrs. Gregory was fond of young clergymen. She considered her niece, Hester, particularly suited for a clergyman's wife, and was always glad to see the young curates of the neighbourhood at her house. It was "worth" she wanted for Hester, not "money." Hester would have plenty of that for both, and this being generally understood, Mrs. Gregory's invitations to the black-coated fraternity, as may be supposed, were readily responded to.

Mr. Hayward was not so young as the unbeneficed clergy of the Church of England generally are, but there was a family living, which, in course

of time would become his, and he therefore worked on quite contentedly as a curate, and was none the less considered in the neighbourhood, because of his advantageous prospects. It was generally supposed that he admired the eldest Miss Smith, and Mrs. Gregory, who was goodnature itself, thought it only right to ask that young lady to meet him. Clara was older than Hester, and if there was 'something between them,' she (Mrs. Gregory) felt a pleasure in giving them a helping hand. "How are young people ever to know anything of each other, if they never meet?" she would ask. "I am all for letting them see plenty of one another beforehand, and then if there is anything undesirable on either side, they can find it out before it is too late. Besides, young ladies cannot ask young gentlemen to come and look at them, and the young men cannot become acquainted with the young ladies without seeing them, and so what is the use of us old people if we don't bring them together, poor things, and help to make them happy if we can?"

The good lady had asked Miss Smith to come, and bring one of her sisters with her, but she was somewhat disconcerted at seeing Miss Minnie walk into the room when "the Miss Smiths" were announced, Clara being detained for a moment in the hall by a little disarrangement of her dress which Miss Seymour's maid was adjusting for her. Mrs. Gregory had expected the second sister,

Laura, and her reception of Miss Minnie was not so cordial consequently as usual. The two eldest Miss Smiths generally went out together, and Mrs. Gregory had her own reasons for wishing that the usual arrangement on this occasion had not been departed from. She had taken it into her head that Minnie entertained some designs upon Mr. Woods, whom she considered her own, or rather her Hester's peculiar property.

Poor little Minnie's perfect innocence on the subject, rendered her oblivious of any embarrassment in her worthy hostess's manner, and she unconsciously lent confirmation to the old lady's suspicion, by immediately turning to Mr. Woods when her salutations to the rest of the party were over, and taking him to task for not having brought her some book which he had promised to lend her.

Mr. Woods had been talking to Blanche Lennox, and was standing near her and Hester Seymour in a corner of the room to which they had withdrawn themselves. There was a vacant chair on the other side of Blanche, and Minnie at once took possession of it, thereby terminating a debate in the curate's own mind, as to whether he might venture to occupy it himself or not. He did not feel over amiably disposed towards the young lady in consequence, and Mrs. Gregory might have been perfectly at ease about them both, if she had

only known what was passing in their minds at the moment.

In a minute or two Minnie completed his discomfiture by saying, "Now, Mr. Woods, do go and speak to Miss Barbara Lennox. She has looked at that album, which she is pretending to admire, a hundred times already, and will be thankful to have an excuse for putting it down. I want to have Blanche to myself for a few minutes, and after tea we shall have to sing and play, so now is my only chance. You are dreadfully in our way here."

Mr. Woods covered his confusion with a laugh, and walked towards the table where Barbara was seated, inwardly maledicting Miss Minnie as he went.

"How rude you are, Minnie," said Blanche, with a smile, as Minnie seized her with both hands the instant the curate had turned his back. "Poor Mr. Woods was making himself very agreeable, and you ought not to have sent him away like that."

"Oh, he is all very well in his way," was the answer, "but I want to talk to you and Hester, and I could not say a word with him standing there." And forthwith began one of those mysterious, confidential, and deeply interesting conversations which young ladies find it so necessary to indulge in on all possible occasions, though

what it was all about they might themselves be afterwards sorely puzzled to declare.

After tea, Hester played whilst the two Miss Smiths and Mr. Woods sang. Barbara had to listen to some household troubles which were just then weighing upon Mrs. Gregory's mind, and Blanche found herself on a sofa with Mr. Hayward, who did not sing, and was very much inclined to talk during the performance at the piano, instead of listening to it in respectful silence as he ought to have done. Several times Blanche had to remind him gently that "they must not speak too loud," but he invariably forgot in another minute or so, and was as loud again as ever.

"Are you expecting your eldest brother, Miss Lennox?" he asked, after a slight pause in the conversation, caused by the necessity of applauding the last song, and begging for another, which Clara Smith immediately began, whilst Minnie and Mr. Woods retired to a little distance, and were detected by the vigilant eyes of Mrs. Gregory in what she deemed a flirtation which she was bound to interrupt. "Ah! I suppose he would hardly come down before Christmas though," added Mr. Hayward, with some hesitation in his manner.

"No," answered Blanche, quietly. "My eldest brother is abroad just now. We hope to see him in the spring, but I don't suppose he will return

to England sooner than that. You know that he has become a Roman Catholic, do you not?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Hayward. "I met him when I was travelling some weeks ago, and he told me so himself. I was truly grieved, for I was sure it must be a great sorrow for you all, and we can ill afford to lose good men from our ranks just now. He went abroad again then? I remember, he was just returning from the continent when I saw him. He got into the same railway carriage with me at Dover, and told me that he had come over that afternoon by the boat."

"When do you say that was?" enquired Blanche. "Not *returning* was he? It was the end of October when he left England with a cousin of ours, and he had not been abroad before that for a very long time."

Mr. Hayward seemed puzzled. "I am quite sure he told me that he had been abroad, and had only crossed over to England the day I met him. How very singular!"

Now it was Blanche's turn to look perplexed. "I think you must be mistaken, Mr. Hayward," she said. "Do you remember the exact date? Was he alone when you saw him?"

"Yes, he was quite alone, and I will tell you the exact date in a minute. Let me see. I had been staying with my sister for a few days, and was on my way back to Croydon. I was due there on the second of November, which is my uncle's

birthday, and I had promised to be there the night before. Of course,—I remember now,—it was All Saints Day, the first of last month; and I had been to such a wretched service at a Dover church in the morning. I recollect now perfectly."

"How very odd," said Blanche, with an air of astonishment. "He left England the end of October, I am certain, and our cousin Mr. Graham was with him, although *he* had to return almost immediately, owing to his father's illness. But on the first of November, Gerald must have been abroad, at any rate he could not have been coming back to England, as he has not been back since. I really think Mr. Hayward you must be mistaken," she repeated with emphasis.

"No, Miss Lennox. What you say puzzles me, I confess, but there is no doubt about my having seen your brother on the day I mentioned. What makes me feel still more positive on the subject is, that he shewed me a paper containing that abominable paragraph about *his* conversion. I got a copy of it myself afterwards, and kept it. The date of the paper was the first of November, and your brother pulled it out of his pocket, having just bought it at the station."

"Well, I cannot make it out," said Blanche. "I will write to Gerald to-morrow, and ask him to explain the mystery. He is at Brussels now. Were you ever there, Mr. Hayward?"

The conversation then turned upon foreign

tours in general, and Belgian ones in particular. Mr. Hayward had travelled a good deal, and had the rare power of being able to describe well and vividly what he had seen. Blanche listened with an interest which was not feigned, but her thoughts wandered in spite of herself to the meeting which Mr. Hayward had described between himself and Gerald, when she felt convinced in her own mind such a meeting must have been impossible, and she wondered whether the worthy curate could possibly be a little mad, or if she could by any chance have mistaken the date of her brother's departure from England. He might have been at Dover just before he started, on some business or other, there was nothing unlikely in that, but that Mr. Hayward should have met him *coming back from abroad* just at that time! There must be some wonderful mistake on his part. She could not make it out at all.

Mr. Woods was a very conscientious, hard-working young man. He came to Wentmore after a twelvemonth's experience in a Low Church parish in the west of England, and the different atmosphere both social and ecclesiastical in which he at once found himself, affected him considerably. He had never before been brought in such close contact with persons of high birth and breeding. Lady Frances Lennox and her daughter were like beings of another world to him, a world he had read and heard of, but never till then had mixed

with. Mr. Lennox was a man of enlarged mind and gracious manners. The shy young curate soon found to his own surprise that his Rector thought it no condescension to discuss questions of either religious or political interest with him, and he was never recalled to a sense of his own inferiority, either in learning or position, when conversing with Mr. Lennox, as had often been the case, when he had come across men of his calibre before. Gerald and Ferdinand Lennox had with their decided views on all church questions and their real unaffected goodness, helped greatly towards changing his own opinions on religious subjects, but above all, the society of their sister and her cousin Barbara, had become a source of gratification and delight to him, which had rendered his life at Wentmore hitherto one of more than ordinary happiness.

If Mr. Woods had been asked three months after his arrival at Wentmore, which of the Miss Lennoxes he preferred, he would have been puzzled to say, for the simple reason, that up to that time he had been so accustomed to think of them together, as to be scarcely conscious himself of any decided preference between them. He had now been Mr. Lennox's curate for nearly a twelve-month, and there was no longer any possibility of concealing the real state of his feelings from himself, and one or two others had some suspicion of the state of the case as well.

Barbara Lennox had been away from Wentmore on a visit to some friends in the West of England, and during her absence, Blanche had visited the schools and the poor, played the organ in church, and been thrown so constantly in the way of meeting her father's curate, that he first became aware how deeply his own affections were involved by finding how completely out of his usual course he was thrown, if by any accident or chance she was prevented from coming to the school or pursuing any of her charitable avocations when he had made sure of seeing or meeting her. During the lesson hours at the school, he would find his attention wandering from Johnny Seel's spelling, if she was a little later than usual and he would be recalled to a sense of his delinquency by a laugh from some of the other scholars at the mistakes Johnny was making with impunity, whilst he had been listening for the well-known footstep on the gravel path outside. He would then resume his instructions with sudden energy, and the colour would mount to his forehead as he shyly glanced round the group of young urchins to notice if any of them had observed his abstraction. Day after day, week after week, passed on, and it only became a more hopeless case with the young curate.

Miss Barbara returned from her visit, but it was no longer a question in his own mind as to which of the young ladies he now thought most of. Barbara might spend whole mornings at the

schools, and meet him besides at a dozen different places in the course of the day, and he would scarcely remember that she had done so. But if Blanche's slight figure was seen in the distance, or her voice was heard inside a cottage as he passed by, Mr. Woods would find some excuse for going towards her, or visiting that cottage, and feel happy for the rest of the day, if by so doing he gained five minutes conversation with his Rector's daughter.

But of late, a change had come over Arthur Woods. He had been up to London for a few days, to visit some of his relations, and since his return, he had scarcely seemed like the same person. He went through his parochial duties as regularly as before, he took the same pains with his sermons, he was as attentive to the poor, and as frequently at the schools, but the old house-keeper who looked after him in his bachelor lodgings, remarked that he was "not himself at all." He came home late and tired at night, and would sit for an hour, reading or writing, without taking off his dirty boots or wet things. The little dinners she sent in to him, came out almost untouched. He was silent and moody, and she declared she was "afeared something was going wrong with him, she was!"

Others noticed the change as well. But when questioned by the Rector or Lady Frances as to his health, he assured them there was nothing the

matter, and to all Mrs. Gregory's insinuations that he was 'over-working himself, and really should be more careful,' he turned a deaf ear, or declared that no amount of work would ever hurt him.

Blanche had a high opinion of the curate's judgment. She often carried her puzzles about the poor, and the best way of relieving their wants, to him, rather than to her father, as she felt that Mr. Woods was more amongst them, and knew more about their daily way of life, and the real state of their homes, than the Rector, who went to any cottage or house where a wish was expressed for his presence, but otherwise left the practical working of the parish very much in his curate's hands. If it had not been for Blanche's invaluable help, Arthur Woods often felt he should not have been able to get on as well as he did.

The morning after Mrs. Gregory's tea party, Blanche Lennox called for Hester Seymour at eleven o'clock, having arranged to do so the evening before, and the two set off for a walk across the fields. The weather was clear and frosty, and just the right thing, they both declared, for an expedition to Long Pond which was the name of an outlying hamlet of Wentmore parish, though why it was so called it was difficult to make out. There was no appearance of a pond, either long or short at the place, and the oldest inhabitant could not remember anything of the sort. Nevertheless, Long

Pond it was called, and Blanche made periodical descents upon the group of cottages which were approached from the high road by a green lane some mile and a half long. There was a path across the fields which in spite of the stiles was preferred by the young ladies, and they hurried along, chatting merrily as they went, their voices sounding pleasantly through the air.

They were a pleasant sight to look upon, those two. Hester Seymour's fair regular features, and Blanche's *mignon*ne face, both so expressive of warmth and innocence of heart. Hester's was the staidest step of the two, Blanche was so full of life and spirits. She had received letters from both her brothers by the post. Gerald's was dated Brussels. Sidney Graham was with him still. He had gone over to join him there immediately after his father's death, and had remained ever since. Ferdinand announced his intention of returning to Wentmore on Christmas Eve. Both letters had to be fully discussed with Hester, indeed Blanche felt more at her ease when talking to her about them than she did even with Barbara. Barbara's want of sympathy about Gerald always threw her back when his name was brought up between them, and there was a restraint in her manner when Ferdinand was mentioned, although there was no lack of interest, which puzzled Blanche, and made her prefer the honest and hearty readi-

ness which Hester always manifested, to hear all and everything about either of them.

Blanche had some clothing-club tickets to distribute at one or two of the cottages at Long Pond, and as they came within sight of them, she asked Hester to go on to Widow Seel's and give her those she had promised for her children, whilst she went in to see a poor girl who was very ill on the other side of the way. Hester accordingly departed with the tickets, and Blanche stopped at the cottage where the sick girl lived.

She was just about to enter, when her attention was attracted by a violent noise and commotion in the house adjoining. The sound of a woman's voice raised in angry altercation and the crying of a child made her pause, and instead of entering the cottage she had intended to visit, she turned to the other and knocked at the door.

Her knock was apparently not heard, for the noise and tumult continued the same as ever, and after a slight hesitation, Blanche opened the door and went in. She knew the people perfectly well. The man was a farm-labourer, and the wife a hard-working respectable woman enough, but she had a violent temper, and Blanche knew that her children often came badly off in consequence. One of these, as she had suspected, was in disgrace at the present moment. Little "Saireyann" had not done something she was told to do, or had done it badly, anyhow, her mother was exceed-

ingly irate, and Blanche suspected from her attitude and the shrinking manner of the child who was sobbing and crying, that she had been administering bodily chastisement.

If there was one thing more than another which Blanche could not endure, it was to see a child beaten. It might richly deserve its punishment,—that had nothing to do with it,—the moment a great strong arm was lifted against a small sinner, all her sympathy was with the latter, and whatever its offence, she was ready to take its part and do battle for it to the utmost. On this occasion, she felt especially inclined to be on the weaker side, as the woman's temper was well known, and little Sarah Anne was rather a pet of hers, being a delicate quiet child, and more teachable than others of her age in the school.

Hearing the door open, the woman turned round, and the change produced in her manner by Blanche's unexpected appearance, was most striking. Applying her apron to her eyes, and sinking into a chair, she began sobbing violently, and in reply to Blanche's enquiry, which was rather sternly put, as to "what was the matter?" she only murmured something unintelligible about her "trials and troubles," and hid her face in her apron.

Unable to obtain an explanation from the mother, Blanche turned to the little girl who was looking at her appealingly, and asked what she

had been doing, and why her mother was so angry.

"If you please, Miss," answered the child, hesitatingly, looking first at her mother and then at Blanche, "I was washing out the dish to get ready for father's dinner, when mother gave my elbow a jog, without meaning it, and I let it fall. I am very sorry, but it was not my fault," and then she began crying again.

"You little story! You bad girl to say *I* jogged your elbow!" cried the woman, starting up, and advancing towards the child, who shrank back as she did so. "She let it fall herself, Miss, the careless brat, and pretends it was me that pushed her. I'll give it her for telling lies, I will!"

"Oh! Miss, indeed it wasn't my fault," sobbed the child, in her energy, seizing Blanche by her dress.

"Anyhow, I am quite sure you are sorry," said Blanche, "and now run into the garden for a minute. I want to speak to your mother."

Blanche's word in every Wentmore cottage was law. Sarah Anne was out of the door in an instant, and the mother did not offer to stop her.

"I know I was a bit too angry with her, Miss," she began, "but that child is that aggravating in her ways, that I am forced to speak out to her, I am!"

"Now, Lucy," said Blanche, sitting down, and speaking with a serious gravity which well became

her fair young face, "I daresay you are sorry as you always are when you have been in a passion, but you know quite well you have not only been *speaking* to little Sarah Anne, I am afraid you have been beating her as well. And if it was by an accident, for which she was not to blame, that the dish was broken, that was very hard upon the poor child. Now that you are a little cooler, you will allow that yourself, won't you ?"

The woman did not answer, but stood with her face averted, twitching about the apron in her hands, and applying it at intervals to the corners of her eyes.

"What is the use of your telling me so often that you will try and curb your temper, Lucy?" continued Blanche, her tone softening as she went on, "if on the slightest provocation you get so very angry with the children or anyone else who offends you? You know how many enemies you have made amongst your neighbours, by saying in the heat of the moment what you are sorry for afterwards. I have enough to do sometimes in trying to defend you when people complain to me of what you have said or done, and Lucy, you know it grieves me when you give way like this."

"What business have they to talk about me? Let them look at home," began the woman. Then turning towards Blanche, who was looking at her sorrowfully, she suddenly burst into tears, and exclaimed, "Oh ! Miss, I am very bad, I know I

am, but I do try, I do indeed. I am afraid you will not believe me, but if you knew, Miss Blanche, what a work I have with my temper, you would not wonder at my getting in a pet at times. I don't want you to think me better than I am, Miss, I am bad enough, I know. But oh ! Miss, don't give me up. You are the best friend I have in the world, and if you was to give me up I should be done for entirely."

"I shall not give you up, Lucy. Do not be afraid of that, but if you wish to please me you must try not to give vent to your temper the moment you are provoked, in the way you do. You know, Lucy, without my telling you, how wrong it is, and if it grieves *me* when you do so, how much more must it grieve our Lord, who is always watching to see whether you improve or not, and I know you love Him really, and would not offend Him wilfully. Will you promise me to remember this ?"

Blanche's manner was very grave, but so sweet, that the woman sobbed with true emotion as she replied,

"Miss, you are an angel. I always said you was. I will not be so hasty again, I promise you, and as for the blessed childring, the Lord knows I wouldn't hurt a hair of their heads ; really I wouldn't. Bless 'em, He knows that."

Blanche could not help smiling.

"Good-bye, Lucy," she said, rising from her

chair, "I shall tell Sarah Anne she may come in and give you a kiss, and that you are not angry with her any longer. Shall you be able to send her to school next week?"

"Yes, Miss, please God, I hope so. William, he is very angry at my keeping the child so much at home, I can tell you, Miss, but I am that put to, sometimes, to know how to get along, that now the others are out at service, and I not so strong as I was, I don't know what I should do if it warn't for Saireyann."

Blanche opened the door of the cottage, and called to the little girl who was playing with a kitten outside, and had quite forgotten her late trouble. She told her her mother wanted her, and that she need not be afraid, as she would not say anything more to her about the broken dish. Little Sarah Anne looked half-doubtingly up in her face, but its expression reassured her, she dropped a curtsey and ran into the cottage.

Blanche looked back, and saw her caught up into her mother's arms and covered with kisses. She had restored the sunshine in that abode, anyhow. Calling out "good-bye" again to them, she was about to enter the cottage next door, when she perceived Hester Seymour and Mr. Woods advancing towards her from a distance.

Blanche wanted to ask the curate a question, and waited for them to come up, but just before they came within speaking distance, the others

stopped. Mr. Woods shook hands with Miss Seymour, took off his hat to Blanche, and without heeding the hand she held up as if to stop him, hurried off in the direction from which he had come. In another moment he had turned a corner and was out of sight.

"How stupid of Mr. Woods not to see that I wanted to speak to him," said Blanche, as Hester came up to her. "He must have been in a great hurry. I suppose you met him at Widow Seel's cottage?"

"Yes," answered Hester, "he was there when I went in. He promised her another clothing club ticket for the youngest child, which was very good of him, considering how many he gives away already; I think he must have remembered something suddenly, which obliged him to hurry off. He asked me if I had walked over alone, and I was just telling him that you were in one of these cottages, when we looked up and saw you. I did not notice that you were beckoning till he had started, and though I called after him, he did not seem to hear."

"It does not signify," said Blanche, "he must have been in a hurry about something as you say. Now, Hester dear, I must go in here for a few minutes, but I won't keep you long. I have been lecturing Lucy on her temper, and must see poor Ellen, as she is expecting me to-day."

Blanche then went up to the sick girl's room,

and remained with her some time, cheering her with sympathy and kind words. She had brought her some oranges, and as she placed them by her side when she was going away, the poor girl looked up in her face with a grateful smile, and said,

" You will come again soon, Miss ? I feel very lonely all day, for mother she has her work to attend to, and cannot be with me always. I expected a visit from Mr. Woods to-day. He told me he should call, but I suppose he hasn't been able to come this way. It does me good to see him or you, Miss. I sleep the better after it. Goodbye, and thank you kindly, Miss."

Blanche wondered as she walked home across the fields by Hester's side, at Mr. Woods' forgetfulness of his promise to visit poor Ellen Foster. She had not told her that the curate had been close by that afternoon, as she thought it would sound unkind of him to have forgotten his promise of calling to see her, and it was so unlike his usual thoughtfulness, that she could not understand it. However, she concluded in her own mind, that he had been on his way to the cottage, when, as Hester supposed, some other important engagement had occurred to him, and he had been obliged to hasten elsewhere, very possibly intending to see Ellen later in the day. Dismissing the subject from her mind, she turned to Hester and began discussing the Christmas entertain-

ment which was to be given to the school children the following week, and that fully engrossed them until they arrived at Mrs. Gregory's gate.

The church decorations for Christmas were in full progress at Wentmore, both at the Rectory and at Mrs. Gregory's. Hester was very busy that afternoon with a wreath and cross of everlastings, she was preparing for the Founder's Tomb. One of the maid servants was assisting her, and so occupied were they with their work, that neither of them heard a tap at the window of the room in which they were sitting. It was getting dusk, and the maid looking up suddenly, gave a little cry of alarm as she caught sight of a figure outside.

"What is the matter, Charlotte?" asked Miss Seymour, pausing in the adjustment of a bunch of red and yellow flowers, which she was fastening on the wreath.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," answered Charlotte, "I saw someone as I thought at the window. But whoever it was, he is gone now. I daresay it was the gardener, but it startled me for the moment."

Soon after, Hester put on her hat and cloak, and set off to the Rectory to consult with Blanche and Barbara about the adornment of the Font, which was always a grand feature in the floral decorations at Wentmore. As she passed through the little gate which opened from her aunt's

grounds into the village, she met Mr. Woods who was hurrying past.

"Oh! Mr. Woods," she cried, "do come up with me to the Rectory for a few minutes if you can. We are going to arrange about the Font, and I know Blanche wants to speak to you about something."

"I am very sorry, Miss Seymour," replied the curate, "but I am going again to Long Pond as fast as I can. I promised to visit Ellen Foster to-day, and forgot to do so this morning when I was there. I shall be at the church this evening, and then I shall see Miss Lennox, I daresay."

Before Hester could reply, he was gone. She could not help thinking as she pursued her way to the Rectory, that it was odd Mr. Woods should have forgotten Ellen Foster in the morning, when he was close to her cottage, and it must have been a matter of consequence as he was going all that way again when it was getting so late.

"But he is so good," she said to herself, "and would rather go through any trouble or fatigue than disappoint anyone."

Hester was not the least 'in love' with Mr. Woods, but she admired him for his goodness and devotion to his duties, and thought it was not everyone who would take a long walk twice in one day for the sake of keeping his word to a poor girl, when his time was so fully occupied, and he might so easily have put it off till the morrow.

Arthur Woods hurried on over the fields towards the Fosters' cottage, blaming himself considerably for his forgetfulness in the morning as he did so. The high road crossed his path at one point, and just as he reached it, two men passed by, one of whom, the nearest to him, was saying to the other,

"I thought it would not do, and was sorry I had startled them."

The voice struck the curate as familiar. The men had walked on, but he stood for a moment to look after them. "How very odd," he thought, "and the height and figure too, so like his. It is curious if I should be for a second time mistaken."

But he could not tarry. A class of young people preparing for their first communion was awaiting him as soon as he returned home, and he had no time to lose.

An hour later, as Miss Seymour was moving cautiously along a path which led from the Rectory grounds into the village, the high shrubs on either side making it difficult for her to see her way, she thought she saw two figures standing on one side, a little in advance of her. She was so accustomed to traverse the short distance between the Rectory and her aunt's house alone, and knew every inch of the way so well, that she had refused the offer of a companion or a lantern, although it was so dark. It might be her imagination, but she could not help feeling a little fright-

ened. It was quite a private way, and it was seldom any of the tradespeople or others from the village came that way after nightfall, besides, whoever it was, they did not advance, but remained stationary. Summoning her resolution, she went boldly on, her heart beating a little faster the while. As she neared the spot where she had fancied the figures were standing, it seemed as if they had disappeared. At any rate she could see nothing of them. Hurrying on, in a few minutes more she reached her own door, and running upstairs to her room, she rang the bell for her maid.

"I think you must have made me nervous, Charlotte," she said, as the latter appeared. "I thought I saw two men in the Rectory path just now, as I was coming along by myself, but when I came up to the place, they had vanished."

"Dear! Miss," answered Charlotte. "Well, I'm sure that there was someone at that window this afternoon, although I made light of it at the time for fear of frightening you. But do you know, Miss, it is getting quite late, and Thomas was taking in the tea things as I came upstairs."

CHAPTER XI.

A LOUD peal at the front door bell, startled the ladies at Wentmore Rectory, as they stood before the drawing-room fire, the dressing bell having just rung, and Miss Seymour having left them some ten minutes or more.

"Who can that be, I wonder?" exclaimed Blanche.

"No one calling at this hour?" said Lady Frances, looking askance, as she spoke, at her daughter and niece.

"Listen;" said Barbara. "That is a gentleman's voice, and he is coming in."

The next moment the drawing-room door was flung open, and "Mr. Graham" was announced.

"Sidney!" cried the three ladies at once.

Lady Frances and Blanche turned round with surprise, not unmixed with anxiety, to meet him.

"When did you come over?" asked Lady Frances, as he advanced towards her. "We thought you were in Brussels with Gerald. There

is nothing the matter is there ?" and the mother's voice trembled as she spoke.

" Do not alarm yourselves," was the answer, as Sidney shook hands with her and his cousins. " Gerald is perfectly well. I am not the bearer of ill tidings, quite the reverse. I was afraid I should startle you all by my sudden appearance, but I have some business matters to transact with Uncle Lennox, and came off without writing as I felt sure of finding him at home just now. How is he ? and how are you all ?"

Having satisfied herself that nothing was wrong with Gerald, Lady Frances went into the library to acquaint her husband with his nephew's arrival, and Blanche departed in quest of Mrs. Statham to get a room prepared for him.

Sidney turned to Barbara as soon as they were alone.

" Bibi, can I trust you with a secret ?"

She looked up half frightened, in his face.

" Yes. What is it ?"

" Gerald is here ; in the village ; walking up and down outside, in fact, and I have come to prepare his father and mother for seeing him."

" Gerald here !" cried Barbara. Then lowering her voice as Sidney made a gesture of warning, she added, " But my uncle will be so angry ! How could he come without leave ? It is very wrong of him."

" Now, Barbara, listen to me. I should not

have said a word to you, had I not believed you were to be trusted. I shall tell my uncle, and if he consents to see Gerald, which I am sure he will do, then he will himself tell Aunt Lennox and Blanche. If, by any chance, he refuses, you must not say a word to either of them, and I will get him away at once."

At that moment, Lady Frances re-entered the room. Barbara looked at Sidney, and bowed her head slightly in token of acquiescence. She did not venture to speak.

"Now, go and dress, both of you;" exclaimed their aunt. "We shall be late for dinner, and your uncle does not like to be kept waiting. Did Gerald get our last letter before you came away?" she asked, as she followed Sidney into the hall.

Sidney answered in the affirmative, although he did not know whether Gerald had or not, and he was glad to hurry off to his room, which a footman was waiting to show him, to avoid further questioning.

During dinner, the conversation flowed easily enough. Mr. Lennox had often been to Brussels, and it amused him to talk over his reminiscences of the Belgian capital.

"I suppose there is the same Chaplain there still?" he asked, as the dessert was being placed upon the table.

"I believe so," answered Sidney. "But I really don't know for certain, as I generally went

with Gerald to church, and we did not know many of the English. The best set amongst the Belgians are rather bigoted, and look shyly upon the English Protestants, but Gerald knew several of the really good families, and, of course, got on with them very well."

A sudden silence fell upon the party. Sidney had not been looking at his uncle as he spoke. His dinner napkin had fallen on the ground, and he had stooped to pick it up. Now he looked round and saw at once the mistake he had made. He hastened to rectify it.

"I met Mr. D—, the King's Chaplain, at dinner once," he said, speaking fast, and addressing his uncle, who was passing the wine with a certain compressed movement of the mouth which was a sure sign that his equanimity was disturbed, "and a very nice old fellow he is. Did you know him at all? The Duke is very fond of him, and he is constantly at the Palace. Everyone likes him immensely."

Mr. Lennox's countenance relaxed.

"Oh, yes, he is a very old friend of mine. We were at College together." And then began a long story about his College days and quondam allies, many of whom he had since lost sight of, which apparently drove Gerald and any unpleasant reflections connected with his name from the Rector's mind. Lady Frances and the girls soon after, got up and left the room.

"Which wine are you drinking, Sid?" asked Mr. Lennox, drawing his chair near the fire, and passing the bottles towards his nephew. "Help yourself, and tell me how you left that Popish son of mine, on the other side of the water."

Sidney had been cogitating in his own mind, the best way of introducing Gerald's name, when the ladies should have withdrawn, and his uncle's question relieved him greatly. At the same time, he could not help feeling slightly embarrassed as he answered,

"Gerald is very well, uncle, he looks stronger than he did in London, but I don't think, poor fellow, he is quite happy. He often —"

"Not quite happy!" interrupted Mr. Lennox, hastily. "I daresay not. What can a fellow expect who goes blindfold into such a system as that, but to meet with disappointment, and what does he deserve after treating his parents and all belonging to him in the way he has done, but to be unhappy?"

Sidney felt taken aback.

"I don't think he is unhappy about his religion at all," he explained, "but I am sure it is a great trial to him not being able to come here and see you all. He feels that you have not really forgiven him, as long as he is not allowed to do that. I have told him that I am sure in time it will be all right, but he does not care for any such assurance on my part. He has always been so much

at home,—he cannot bear the idea of being cut off from you all, as he is at present."

"Well, it's his own fault, his own fault," returned the Rector. "So far as I am concerned, he might return to-morrow. It is no pleasure to me to be separated from any of my children, but I will not have him tampering with his brother and sister, and contaminating them as well. He has made a fool of himself and must take the consequences. One in the family is quite enough, for those priests to get hold of."

"I am quite sure he would not attempt to influence Ferdinand or Blanche, if he saw them," said Sidney, thinking that he noticed signs of relenting as his uncle spoke. "He did meet Ferdinand in London as you know, and he certainly did not try anything of the kind with him."

"Your aunt told me that you had some business matters to consult me about," said Mr. Lennox, in a tone which implied 'We have talked enough about that, and will now turn the subject.' "What is it? Something about your poor father's will, I suppose? He and his cousin, the old General, were quite reconciled before he died, were they not? It was singular that the one should outlive the other so short a time."

But Sidney thought of an anxious waiter outside. He could almost fancy he heard occasional footsteps approach the window of the dining-room,

and he was determined to bring matters to an issue.

"Uncle, to tell you the truth," he began, "it was no business of my own which brought me over to see you at this moment. It is on Gerald's account, and his only, that I have come. I promised him that I would get your leave for him to return and see you all at once. If you had not always been so good and kind to me, I should not have ventured to do this, but I promised, and I must keep my word."

He rose and stood over his uncle, placing his hand on the Rector's shoulder as he spoke.

Mr. Lennox turned away his head.

"It is all very well for you, Sid, to take his part. As I said, I should like to see the poor lad very well myself, but——"

"May he come at once? If he was here, now, would you see him?"

Mr. Lennox started up.

"Here—at once—what do you mean?"

He was so utterly unprepared for what he saw was his nephew's meaning, that he could not conceal his emotion. He could not disguise the joy he felt at the thought of meeting Gerald again, whose defection he had so deeply and sorely lamented, but whom he loved so truly, and from whom he had separated himself only through a stern sense of duty and obligation, to the other dear ones around him.

It was enough for Sidney. He did not hesitate another moment, but walked straight out of the dining-room into the hall and opened the front door.

"Gerald," he called, "are you there?"

A figure advanced through the darkness.

"Well?" Gerald's voice responded eagerly.

"Come in." Sidney took his cousin by the arm and led him into the house. The dining-room door was open as he had left it. He pushed Gerald forward, then pulled the door to, and left the father and son together.

As he turned round, he saw Barbara coming out of the drawing-room on the other side of the hall.

"It is all right," he said, advancing towards her. "Let us go to Aunt Lennox and Blanche and tell them."

She turned back with him directly.

On seeing Barbara come back into the room with Sidney, Blanche, who was sitting on a sofa by her mother's side, looked up. "Who is in the dining-room with papa?" she asked. "I hear voices. The schoolmaster, I suppose?"

"No, it is not the schoolmaster," answered Sidney, and he went up to his aunt and knelt down on one knee by her side.

Barbara beckoned Blanche to the other end of the room. "Come here, darling," she said, "I have some good news for you."

Lady Frances was surprised at Sidney's attitude of devotion. It was unlike him, especially with her, and she thought he must be looking for something.

"Have I dropped anything?" she said, and drew back her dress to aid him in his imaginary search.

"Can you guess who is in the next room with Uncle Lennox?" asked Sidney, smiling, and still remaining on one knee.

She looked at him attentively. Then turned very pale.

"Not Gerald?"

Sidney rose, placed himself by her side, and took her hand in his.

"Blanche! Barbara! come here," he cried. "I have told Aunt Lennox, or rather she has guessed what I had to tell her."

But Blanche was already in the next room, with her arms round Gerald's neck.

The next hour at Wentmore Rectory was a very happy one. Gerald sat by his mother on her little sofa, with Blanche on a low stool at his feet. Mr. Lennox was playing at chess with Barbara, but his glance continually wandered from the board to the couple on the sofa, and a smile hovered on his lips, whilst occasionally he joined by a word or two in their conversation. Sidney leaned over the back of Barbara's chair, apparently watching the game, but he too was quite as much

taken up with the group in Lady Frances's corner. It was certainly pleasant to see from time to time the gentle pressure of her son's arm by the loving mother, who in the joy of beholding him once more by her side, forgot any sorrow she might have experienced on his account since they last had met. Gerald's look of perfect contentment, as he answered in a low tender voice her many questions, whilst he squeezed his sister's hand which he held in his own, was expressive of the happiness which filled his heart, and Sidney thought with considerable self-complacency that a good deal of that happiness just now, was owing to him and his intervention with the head of the family. It was rather a novel sensation with him, that of having contributed towards the happiness of others, and he enjoyed it, with a sort of animal enjoyment.

But what made him feel more satisfied with himself than anything, was the sight of his cousin Blanche's sweet and smiling countenance, as she looked up in her brother's face, and every now and then turned round to the chess-players, with a laughing remark in which he himself was included, as if to make them all join in the gladness which filled her heart and sparkled in her eyes. How bright and beautiful she looked, and how strangely Sidney's heart beat as he gazed upon her, and thought again with renewed complacency of the part he had played, (which certainly had been a much easier one than he had expected), in the

little domestic drama which was enacting before him.

He lighted the candles for his aunt and cousins, in the hall, when they were going up to bed some two hours afterwards. Before giving Blanche her's, he held out his hand to say good-night. She took it in her's, and looking up into his face, said,

"Oh ! Sidney, how can we ever thank you for this ? Gerald tells me it is all owing to you. We shall none of us ever forget it."

Sidney murmured something about "nonsense," but coloured up with satisfaction, and looked "quite handsome" as Barbara declared when they were going upstairs. He walked back into the drawing-room where Mr. Lennox was standing on the rug with his arm round Gerald's neck.

"Now you two foreigners must be tired with your long journey," he said, as Sidney re-entered the room. "I have some writing to do before I go to bed; but if you take my advice you will be off soon."

"I don't know how you feel, Gerald," said Sidney, throwing himself into a chair, and stretching out his legs, "I think Uncle Lennox is about right."

"It would be of no use my going to bed," returned Gerald, "I am too much excited to sleep."

"Well, don't keep the servants up," said his father, patting him on the shoulder. "So ring

the bell for what you want, and then you can do as you like."

Gerald followed Mr. Lennox into the library, where a writing table was placed near the fire with two lighted candles upon it.

"Good-night, father," he said, and threw his arms round his father's neck.

"God bless you, my boy."

The Rector's voice trembled as he spoke. Gerald hurried from the room to conceal his own emotion. Mr. Lennox leaned with his arm on the chimney-piece, his face concealed by his hand. As the door closed, Gerald fancied he heard the sound of a sob.

"O God!" he cried, striking his forehead. "Give me strength. I never felt it hard to do Thy Will—till now!"

He rushed straight up to his room, and did not go down again that night.

When Sidney Graham had followed his father's remains to the grave, he paid and dismissed the servants, shut up the house in Edinburgh, which he left in charge of an agent, threw himself into the train, and never stopped until he arrived at the door of his cousin Gerald's lodgings in Brussels. That he was not expected by Gerald we know, but Sidney needed sympathy, and that of a kind, which should not call for any great exhibition of feeling, on his own part. This he knew he should meet with in Gerald, and Gerald was flattered and

pleased at his turning to him so naturally in his sorrow. For six weeks the two cousins remained very happily together, each going his own way, and neither interfering with the other. Sidney was quiet and subdued, Gerald happy in feeling that he was of use and a comfort to him. As Christmas approached, Sidney noticed a change come over his cousin; he became silent and melancholy, and Sidney who was beginning to recover his spirits, felt rather bored in consequence.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" he asked, one day, as they were pacing up and down the Boulevard, and Gerald had for the last half hour, replied only in monosyllables to his remarks, whilst his thoughts were evidently wandering.

"Shall I tell you?" said Gerald, turning round and looking at him fixedly. "I am home sick. This will be the first Christmas in my life, that I have passed away from my people, and I cannot help feeling it. Now don't laugh at me, and I will tell you something."

Then he told Sidney the story of his expedition of a day and a half from Calais to London and back, and of his visiting Hillsborough on his way. Sidney did not laugh. He saw at once that this was no ordinary matter. Sidney's regard for his cousin Gerald was sincere, it was not unselfish, but for that very reason it was in him the more sincere. Gerald was necessary to him, and Gerald out of spirits was not the sort of companion he

enjoyed. When he was low and dejected himself, he liked to have the affectionate and cheering sympathy, his cousin was ever ready to give, but it was not at all the same thing, to have to cheer and encourage *him*. Sidney listened attentively to Gerald's story, and then said,

"I tell you what it is, my boy. Like a great many other very good people, you are a bit of a — well, I won't say what, because it would be uncomplimentary. But if you take my advice you will just go home. Put up your things, and start with me this very day for England. We can cross over by the night boat, and to-morrow you will be at Wentmore, and take my word for it they will be as pleased to see you, as you will be to see them."

"But you forget my father's injunction, that I should not come near them till he gave me leave. How can I go?" said Gerald, rather impatiently.

"Leave that to me. I will manage the governor. Now, will you go? Yes or no?"

Gerald was only too willing to be persuaded that it would be the best thing for him to do. After a little more hesitation, he returned with his cousin to their lodgings, and the two set off from Brussels that afternoon by the mail train, as Sidney had proposed.

When they drew near the end of their journey on the following day, Sidney felt some of Gerald's misgivings steal over him. What if his uncle

should prove restive, and refuse to see the recusant son after all? It would not be exactly pleasant for him to find that he had made matters worse than they were. It was therefore agreed that they should not enter the village till night-fall, and that Sidney should then proceed alone to the Rectory, and pave the way for Gerald's appearance. But if Sidney did not feel sure in his own mind of success, Gerald was still less sanguine. His anxiety made him exaggerate the extent of his father's anger, and the nearer they approached to Wentmore, the more his courage failed him. At a village some two miles and a half from Wentmore, they stopped and dismissed the fly which had brought them from the railway station, leaving their portmanteaus at the inn, and walked on the rest of the way. Gerald did not wish to show himself in the village street, and when Sidney, who was not so well known, entered the Bull Inn, in order to get a tumbler of hot brandy and water, "just to warm himself up," as he said, the former stole in by a side gate to Mrs. Gregory's grounds, with the half intention of discovering himself to the old lady or her niece, should he see anything of them. They were very old friends, and he was quite sure of what their reception of him would be. It was then that he startled Miss Seymour's maid, by looking in upon her and her mistress, as they sat in the little room at the back of the house, at work upon the decorations. He had intended to

discover himself on first seeing them, and tapped gently at the window for that purpose; but as they did not seem to hear him, he changed his mind, and was moving away, feeling glad that he was able to do so unobserved, when the maid looked up and saw him, as we described in the last chapter. Meeting Sidney outside the inn, they again returned to the high-way, and walked about till it was dark, when they turned their steps towards the Rectory, and it was just when Gerald was recounting his expedition into Mrs. Gregory's garden, that Mr. Woods passed them, on his way to Long Pond.

Gerald's impatience prevented his remaining far from the house when Sidney entered. He wandered about on the lawn, looking up at the windows and watching the lights where the shutters were not closed. Once he fancied he caught sight of Blanche's form at one of them. At another time he felt sure that he heard Mrs. Statham's voice, scolding some delinquent housemaid, for leaving a window open, which ought to have been shut. "Dear old thing," he said to himself, "how little she thinks that I am out here." Once he ventured quite close to the dining-room window, and fancied he could distinguish his father's and Sidney's voices in conversation, but the shutters were closed, and he could see nothing but a ray of light through the chinks.

The sound of Sidney's voice when he at length

called him to come in, reassured him completely, and his heart beat with joy as he crossed the hall, and in another moment found himself in his father's arms.

When the family assembled the next morning at the breakfast table, Mr. Lennox's manner had resumed somewhat of its sternness. He had talked over the matter of Gerald's return, with his wife, and he was startled by the way in which she took it for granted, that he was to remain with them now for some time, as a matter of course. All his fears and misgivings, as to the prudence of allowing his misguided son to associate with his brother and sister, in all the freedom of their former unrestrained intercourse, returned upon him, and imparted a restraint to his manner, which Gerald was not slow to perceive.

Blanche was in an ecstasy of delight, and seemed as if she did not know which to smile upon most, the darling brother, or the cousin who had brought him back to them so unexpectedly. Sidney was quite satisfied with this state of things, and felt every hour more pleased with himself, for what he had done.

As if by a tacit understanding, both Gerald and his father avoided the subject of the future. The former was too glad to find himself once more in the dear home of his youth, from which it seemed to him (so much had happened since he was last among them,) that he had been absent years in-

stead of a few months only, and the Rector after a while, put aside his doubts as to the harm this son's Papistical notions might do his other children, and allowed himself to enjoy his company without restraint.

When Ferdinand heard of his brother's unexpected return, he wrote immediately to express his satisfaction and delight, and only regretted that he could not arrange to be at home before Christmas Eve, when however, they might expect him without fail.

Blanche, Barbara, and Hester Seymour enlisted the new comers at once in the preparations which they were making for the church decorations, and their assistance was the more requisite as Mr. Woods had been summoned away, in consequence of his mother's illness, on the morning after Gerald's return, and he too was not expected back until the last thing on Christmas Eve.

One morning, after breakfast, Gerald drew Sidney on one side.

"Come into the study, Sid, for a minute," he said, taking his cousin by the arm. Then as they went along the passage together, he added, "I can't stay here for to-morrow you know. I must go away to-day."

"My dear fellow, what is that for?" enquired Sidney.

"This is Christmas Eve. I must hear Mass to-morrow. At any rate, I could not be here. It

would be too trying for all of us. I am sure you must see that."

Sidney did not attempt to argue the question. It was one he could not enter into. If Gerald's religion required him to absent himself from his family on the morrow, that was his affair.

"You will come back again, I suppose?" he said. "I shall remain here, as I am here."

"Oh, of course," answered Gerald. "As to when I shall return, that will depend on circumstances."

He was evidently in low spirits. Sidney lit a cigar, and strolled off in the direction of the stables.

"Tell Blanche I am at her service when she wants me," he said, as he left the room.

Blanche had informed Gerald and Sidney at breakfast, that she should require their services in an hour's time for some mysterious purpose, and begged they would not take themselves out of the way.

She came into the study soon after Sidney had left, with her hat on, in search of them. Gerald was standing at the window. He turned round, and a smile lighted up his face, which had been grave enough a moment before, when he saw who it was.

"Now then, I am come to carry you off," she said. "Where is Sidney?"

"He is quite ready," answered Gerald, taking

her head between his two hands, and kissing her fair open brow. "I will go and call him."

"You will find me in the hall, then," said Blanche. "I must just speak to mamma, for one minute before I go."

When Gerald walked up to the front door with Sidney soon after, he found his sister standing on the steps of the portico waiting for them.

"Now then," she cried, "there is no time to lose. Hester will wonder what has become of us. I daresay she has been hard at work for the last hour. It is a good thing we have you two creatures to help us, as Mr. Woods doesn't come back till quite late, and Ferdinand won't be here till nearly dinner time, I suppose."

Lady Frances and Barbara were standing by the hall fire.

"How pleasant it is to hear her laugh again like that," said the former, as her eye followed Blanche and her companions down the drive.

"Yes," answered Barbara. "Blanche's spirits have risen wonderfully of late. I think cousin Sid's visit must have something to do with it. It looks decidedly suspicious."

"My dear girl, don't talk such nonsense," said Lady Frances, gravely. "How delightful it will be to see Gerald and Ferdinand together once more," she continued, "it will seem quite like old times." And the mother sighed and smiled, and pressed a kiss on her niece's forehead, feeling

in the soft gladness of heart, to which she had been a stranger of late, a necessity for kissing some one. Barbara allowed herself to be kissed, although she did not return the caress in any way, and then hurried off, to practise a song her cousin Ferdinand was fond of, whilst Lady Frances went about her household duties.

Blanche was very busy that morning. She took Gerald and Sidney into the church, and made them help her and Miss Seymour to arrange the wreaths and flowers, which they had been preparing for some time past, against the festival. Only once did a cloud overshadow the brightness of her mood, and that was when the woman, whose time-honoured office it was to throw the church into disorder every Saturday morning, and set it to rights again on Saturday afternoon, and who was always there to lend a helping hand at "dressing" times, came up to her, and whispered, "Well, Miss, I am just pleased to see Mr. Gerald amongst us once again. I always said he would come back, although there was others as held out that he wouldn't. Just as if it was likely *he* would ever desert the Rector and all of us like that!"

"Give me that wreath of ivy, please," answered Blanche. Her voice shook, and it was all she could do for the moment to restrain her tears. She looked round and saw Gerald bending over the font with Hester Seymour. They were placing moss on the steps, as a ground work for

the camellias and other choice flowers, which were to adorn it a little later. Gerald turned round suddenly, and caught Blanche's eye. "Come here, darling," he cried, "and give us the benefit of your advice. Miss Seymour does not know whether to fill in the space between the little pillars or not."

Blanche hurried up to them, and in the discussion which ensued, speedily forgot the pang which the poor woman's observation had caused her.

When luncheon was over, Gerald followed his sister into the drawing-room, and told her that he was going up to London, by the evening train from Milsom.

"I shall not say anything to my father. The carriage will take me when it goes to fetch Ferdinand. Sidney will explain to him, when I am gone, the reason of my disappearance. I am sure it will be best. I could not bear, Blanche, darling, to be here to-morrow, and not go to church with you all. You will understand that, I am sure."

"Yes, yes, I see," answered poor Blanche. She had not thought of it, and all the brightness of the last few hours seemed to fade away at once.

When Lady Frances was told, her eyes filled with tears, and she did not speak for a few moments. Then she asked Gerald, who was bending

over her, "When do you return? When shall we see you again?"

"Oh, very soon, I promise you it shall be very soon, dearest," he said. "I shall see Ferdinand for a minute at the station. God knows what even this peep of you all, has been to me."

Sidney accompanied him to the station. The servants wondered at Mr. Gerald's luggage being placed in the carriage. They had thought he was only going to meet his brother. Mr. Lennox was not at home when they started, and no other observations were made. Barbara was in the village, and Lady Frances and Blanche took leave of him upstairs.

When they arrived at the station, the train from London was due, and Gerald had to wait ten minutes for his.

"Here it comes," said Sidney, who was standing on the edge of the platform and looking down the rail. In another minute, the engine, with its long line of carriages, came puffing up, and stopped on the opposite side.

Before it had moved off again, the bell rang for the up train.

"There!" exclaimed Sidney, "you won't see him after all!"

The train which had brought down Ferdinand Lennox, went slowly off as the other arrived, and Gerald had to get in: feeling rather disgusted than otherwise. He at once crossed over to the

further end of the carriage, and let down the window. His brother was standing on the opposite platform with a hat-box in his hand : Mr. Woods was by his side. They could not cross until the up train had started.

"Ferdinand!" cried Gerald, from his window. Ferdinand started at the well-known voice, and looked in the direction from whence it came.

At that instant the train began to move. The brothers could only wave their hands at each other. Ferdinand could not make out what this departure of Gerald's meant, and was dreadfully disappointed. The first person he saw when Gerald's train was gone, and he had crossed over the line, was Sidney.

"What does this mean? and where is Gerald gone?" he asked.

"I will tell you all about it on our way home," answered Sidney. "Come along. We must not keep the horses waiting."

Then he shook hands with Mr. Woods, and told him they would be very glad to see him at Wentmore. "Where," he added, "Miss Blanche has been making us work hard all the morning, and I don't know when they will be done tonight."

Gerald drove straight to his club on arriving in town. As his cab stopped at the door, another was just starting from it, and the occupant was giving his directions to the driver. Gerald thought

he knew the voice. He looked out. It was his cousin, Lord Dereham.

"Holloa! Gerald, is that you?" exclaimed the young lord, catching sight of him. "Where do you spring from? How are you, old fellow?"

Gerald sprang out and grasped his cousin's hand. In a few words he explained that he had come up from Wentmore, and why he had done so.

"Ah, yes, I understand," said Lord Dereham, pulling a grave face. "And where are you going? You have given up your old lodgings, I suppose?"

"Yes;" said Gerald. "I shall put up at an hotel somewhere. It is not worth while to take rooms for the short time I shall stay."

"Oh, nonsense, don't go to an hotel," cried the other, who knew enough to believe that his cousin's purse, just then, could not be a heavy one. "There's no one in Grosvenor Square. Old Mother Hastings will make you comfortable there, as long as you like to stay. Tell her to give you my room, which is all ready. I am very glad I met you. The idea of your going anywhere else!"

He then explained that he was returning to his place in Norfolk, where his father and sister had joined their party. "I shall be up again soon, I daresay," he said, "and if you have nothing better to do, shall carry you off with me, when your

church-going days are over. I don't suppose you would care to be down there just now!" Then laughingly shaking hands with his cousin, he drove off.

Gerald ran into the club, asked if there were any letters for him, and spoke to one or two acquaintances who expressed themselves delighted at his return, and wondered at the same time at seeing him in town just then. He did not stay to enlighten them, when they supposed he was going down to his father's, or somewhere in the country for "to-morrow," but getting into his cab again, he told the driver, to take him to Grosvenor Square.

CHAPTER XII.

FAMILY gatherings at Christmas time, are pleasant things, but as years pass on and changes come, we look round, and miss, first one dear familiar face, and then another from the fireside, one is tempted to regret a custom, which induces so many heart-aches in the end. And the longer such meetings continue undisturbed, the more sadly is their discontinuance felt when they cease.

Christmas at Wentmore hitherto, had always seen the Rector's family assembled together. Now, it could do so no more. But if his absence caused a void at Wentmore, Gerald felt the separation from those most dear to him no less painfully, as he knelt that day, among strangers, in a strange church, to receive the Bread of Life. Nevertheless, there was a sweetness about his first Catholic Christmas which was all its own. He had been present at the Midnight Mass at Farm Street once before, but that was not the same thing. He had felt more or less an intruder then. Now, he had a

right to be there, and the “Gloria in Excelsis” which heralded in the season of gladness, had for him a meaning, it had never had before.

As soon as Ferdinand understood the reason of his brother’s departure, he blamed himself for not having foreseen it sooner. “Of course,” he said, addressing Sidney, and Mr. Woods as they drove towards Wentmore, “I know what he must feel about it, and I was a fool for not thinking of it before. I daresay he will be down again in a day or two.”

“I did not know your brother had returned,” said Mr. Woods. “But now I think of it, I am sure it must have been he whom I saw, walking with you, the night before I left Wentmore,” he added, turning to Sidney Graham. “I was crossing the road near the village, when I passed two persons who were going towards it, and the voice of one of them, struck me as being like that of Mr. Gerald Lennox.”

“No doubt it was his,” answered Sidney, laughing. “We haunted the environs of Wentmore till nightfall, and then Gerald did not show himself until I had paved the way for his appearance, by the most consummate acts of diplomacy.”

He then recounted the story of their arrival at Wentmore on the night in question.

“When did your brother go abroad?” asked Mr. Woods of Ferdinand, when Sidney had fin-

ished. "Could he by any chance, have been in London on the first of last month?"

"I don't think so," replied Ferdinand, "why?"

"Because I fancied, that I saw him that night near the London Bridge Station," said the curate. "I had been seeing a friend off by the train, and was passing near the entrance of the Terminus Hotel, when I noticed some one I thought must be your brother, going into it. I had just been entrusted with a parcel for him, and thinking I might be able to deliver it at once, although I was rather surprised at seeing him there, I hurried after him. I explained to the people of the hotel that I wished to speak to the gentleman who had just entered, and whom I thought was a Mr. Lennox, but they assured me that he was a Mr. Stewart; and I took it for granted, therefore, that I was mistaken."

"Curiously enough," said Ferdinand, "Stewart is one of Gerald's names. It was my mother's family name. But it could not have been he you saw, as he certainly was not in England then."

"I think I know a little more about that than you do," said Sidney, who had been listening to Mr. Woods' narrative with a smile. "As it happens, Gerald was in London, and at that very hotel on the night in question, though whether it was really he that Mr. Woods saw, I cannot say." And then he proceeded to recount the his-

tory of Gerald's expedition from Calais and back, to which the others listened with interest.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ferdinand. "Then you were no doubt right, Woods, after all!"

"It must have been he, and the hotel people made some mistake," said Arthur Woods, thoughtfully. "But taking it for granted at the time, that I had been deceived myself, I thought no more of it until the other night, when equally to my astonishment, as I imagined him still abroad, I fancied I saw him again, and thought it would be strange if I were mistaken a second time."

Blanche had mentioned to Gerald her conversation with Mr. Hayward, on the night of Mrs. Gregory's tea-party, and he had explained the puzzle of his appearance in the Dover train, at a time when he was supposed to be on the other side of the water.

Blanche's eyes filled with tears as he told her in a few words, of his longing to be near them again once more, even without their knowledge, but she smiled at the same time. Her comment upon the story, was a short but expressive one. She stopped, (they were walking together,) made her brother stoop down, kissed him on his forehead, and said, "You darling!" And then began to talk of something else.

As Gerald had not named the day on which they might expect him back at Wentmore, Ferdi-

nand thought at the end of a week, that it was high time he should go up to town, and see what he was about. Accordingly, telling Lady Frances and Blanche that they might expect them both back in the evening, he drove off in the pony carriage to Milsom Station, and in a couple of hours time arrived at his uncle's door in Grosvenor Square.

As he stood under the porch after ringing at the bell, he heard a tap at the dining-room window, which looked out upon the Square. He turned round and saw his brother's face. The next moment, Gerald himself opened the door.

"I was half expecting you," he said. "Dereham has just come, and wants to take me down into Norfolk with him. Come and hear what he says."

"Oh ! that won't do at all," exclaimed Ferdinand, as he followed his brother into the dining-room. "I told them I should bring you back with me to Wentmore to-night."

Lord Dereham was sitting at the table, discussing an impromptu lunch, which the old housekeeper, Mrs. Hastings, had furnished as well as she could at a short notice.

"How are you, my dear boy ?" he said, his mouth full of bread and cheese, as he held out a hand to Ferdinand as he entered. "What is that you say ? Take Gerald back to Wentmore with

you? Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, we shall insist upon carrying you off with us!"

He then proceeded to explain, that having discovered the existence of a Roman Catholic chapel in his neighbourhood, or rather, that there was Mass said weekly at the house of a Roman Catholic gentleman, who had not long been in their part of the world, and who was "a very nice fellow, I can tell you, with a deucedly good-looking little wife too," he had come up to London expressly to take Gerald back with him that very day.

"He has no longer a shadow of excuse, for moping by himself, up here," continued the good-natured young lord, "and my father and Margaret will never forgive me, if I go back without him. If you are pledged to return in his company to Wentmore, my dear Ferd, all I can say is, that you must just come down with us now, stay as long as he does, and then you can take him with you when you go, if you like!"

Lord Dereham was a distinguished looking young fellow. Both his cousins were very fond of him, and there was a winning gracefulness about his manner which it was difficult to resist.

"What does Gerald say himself?" asked Ferdinand.

Gerald explained that there was yet another Day of Obligation at hand, and he did not like putting himself out of the way of being able to go to church. His objection to leaving town on this

score, had been overruled by Dereham, and he felt inclined to accede to his proposal. "If you will come too," he added, "we can then go back to Wentmore together, as I shall certainly see them all again before I return to Brussels."

The mention of Brussels, made Ferdinand and Lord Dereham look at each other, as they were both desirous of keeping Gerald in England if possible, but they offered no remark at the time, and it was agreed that Ferdinand should telegraph to Wentmore to acquaint them with his change of purpose, on their way to the Eastern Counties station, from which they started for Norfolk by the five o'clock train.

Considerable disappointment was felt at the Rectory, on the arrival of the despatch. Lady Frances did not say much about it, but Blanche knew that she needed cheering, and exerted herself more than usual that evening, to be lively and agreeable. Sidney's presence was a great help. He sang, and Barbara played. Mr. Lennox sat in his easy chair apparently engrossed by a new book he was reading, but Blanche noticed that the leaves were not turned over frequently, and she strongly suspected that her father's thoughts were dwelling upon the absentees. Her surmise was confirmed by his starting up, when Barbara closed the piano, and saying as he stood on the rug for a minute,

"I suppose Gerald's taste of foreign life, has made him find Wentmore extra dull, or else those

Jesuit fellows are afraid of trusting such a raw recruit too much with his own family. As for Ferdinand, I take it the shooting at Dereham's has been too great a temptation for him to resist, and so you need not expect to see either of them again for some time."

This was addressed to his wife, and having thus given vent to his feelings, the Rector walked off into his library and shut himself up for the rest of the evening.

Blanche was pained for her father, for she felt that he was annoyed. She tried to persuade herself that Gerald's new opinions had weaned him in some degree from them all, and she knew that she was deceiving herself when she did so. But she resolved to write to both her brothers the next day, and beg them not to remain away longer than they could help.

The New Year had opened with considerable severity. There was a heavy fall of snow, and the ladies were almost entirely confined to the house. Sidney made himself completely at home amongst them, and declared that for his part, he did not care how long the roads were blocked up.

One morning, they were sitting round the fire in the library. Lady Frances and the girls were working, Sidney had established himself with a novel in a very comfortable chair. The Rector, who was never kept at home by weather at any time, was out in the parish.

"You might as well read aloud to us, Master Sidney," said Blanche, putting down her work, and looking up at her cousin. "Is it anything very interesting you have got hold of?"

Sidney was not fond of reading aloud.

"I don't think you would care about it," he said, without taking his eyes off his book. "It is one of Grant's books I picked up at Woods's the other day."

"That reminds me that I have not seen Mr. Woods, excepting in church, since Christmas Day," remarked Lady Frances.

"I suppose he has been very busy lately," said Barbara. "I know there is a good deal of sickness among the poor."

"He is a queer fellow," said Sidney, "I can't make him out at all."

Blanche got up and walked to the window.

"There is papa coming up the drive," she said, "he has no umbrella, and is quite white with the snow which the wind is blowing about in all directions."

Presently, the Rector was heard stamping his feet, and shaking himself in the hall. Blanche went out to help him off with his great coat. "Is mamma in there?" he asked, nodding towards the library.

"Yes, we have been busy working all the morning, and I was trying to get that lazy fellow, Sidney, to read to us, but he pretends his book is not

an interesting one," answered Blanche, as she followed her father into the room.

"Well, my dear, I have some news for you, and not very good news either," Mr. Lennox said, walking up to the fire, and stooping to warm his hands.

"What is it?" enquired his wife, and the others all looked up anxiously.

"My curate has resigned," returned the Rector, "and is going away as soon as I can find a successor."

"Mr. Woods going away!" exclaimed all the ladies at once. And Lady Frances added, "Is his mother worse? or what is the reason?"

"He did not very clearly explain himself," answered Mr. Lennox, "but said something about wishing to work in a town. I suppose he thinks himself thrown away here. I told him I was sorry to lose him, and so I am. A good curate is the most difficult thing to find, and I thought I was provided with one for some time. Now I shall have all the bother of looking for another, answering advertisements, and having fellows on trial, not one of whom will probably do, for Heaven knows how long. I wish to goodness the man would change his mind, but I don't think there is any chance of that, unless you can persuade him."

"Luncheon is on the table, my lady," said a footman, opening the door.

During luncheon Mr. Woods' resignation formed the topic of conversation.

"I wonder if Mrs. Gregory knows about it," said Blanche. "She will be in despair, as Mr. Woods is a great favourite in that quarter. Sidney and I, promised to call for Hester this afternoon, if it cleared up sufficiently to take a walk, so we shall soon hear. It is of no use our asking you to go with us I know, Bibi?"

"No, thank you," said Barbara, with a shiver, "I prefer staying at home such weather as this. I have some letters to write which I have put off for a long time, and shall get through them when you are gone, if I can."

When Blanche and Sidney were shewn into Mrs. Gregory's drawing-room an hour or so later, they found the object of their late discussion sitting with the old lady, and her first words proved that she was as full of the subject of his departure as they had been.

"Oh, my dear, I am so glad you have come!" she exclaimed, as Blanche pressed a kiss upon her cheek. "If anyone is likely to prevail upon this naughty man to change his mind, it is you, for everyone knows you have more influence with him than anyone else. I have said all I can, but it is of no use."

During this speech, the curate who looked somewhat confused, had been shaking hands with the new comers. Sidney eyed him curiously, and with

an attention he had not hitherto bestowed upon him. The mention of Blanche's supposed influence over the young man, in some way displeased him, and he replied coldly to Arthur's inquiries after his health and well-being.

Blanche said how surprised and sorry, they all were to hear that Mr. Woods was thinking of leaving them, and looked as if she meant what she said. Sidney noticed the look, as well as the accent, and felt more disturbed still.

What was it that made this young man so sensitive about any preference, real or imaginary, which might be entertained for his cousin Blanche by another, or which she might evince for some one else? Could it be that he was jealous?

Blanche inquired for Hester. She had just gone into the village, her aunt said, but would be back directly, and was expecting them she knew, so begged they would wait. "I want to shew you my china plates in the hall, Mr. Graham," she added, "I know you are a judge of such things, and have been wishing for your opinion. If you will come with me we will have a look at them, and leave Blanche to bring Mr. Woods to his senses, during our absence."

Sidney looked as if he wished Mrs. Gregory—somewhere else. Arthur Woods muttered something about being obliged to take leave as the days were so short, and Blanche begged to be allowed to come and look at the china plates too, but Mrs.

Gregory was peremptory, and carried off Sidney into the hall, leaving Blanche and the curate alone together.

For a few moments neither of them spoke. Then Blanche taking up a book from the table and pretending to examine it, said, "I hope, Mr. Woods, that you have heard no bad news which obliges you to leave us? I can't tell you how sorry we are to think you are going."

Arthur Woods did not answer, and Blanche, looking up, was surprised to see his eyes fixed upon her, with an expression she had never noticed in them before. He had advanced to the table near which she was sitting, and stood leaning upon it, and looking across at her with a gaze which was almost fierce in its intensity. Presently, in a voice that sounded strangely moved, he said,

"Are you sorry I am going, Miss Lennox? Are you sorry?"

Those words, that look, revealed all. Blanche Lennox saw what was before her. She knew that this man loved her, and that she must nerve herself for the hardest task a woman with a woman's heart, can ever have to perform. She could not prevent what was coming, though she would have given anything to have been able to do so. She felt that it remained with her to make or mar the happiness of another's life, and she could give him no hope,—none whatever.

"Mr. Woods," she said, and her voice slightly trembled, and her cheek turned pale as she spoke, "you have so often and so kindly let me feel that I was a help to you in the parish, and we have always worked so pleasantly together amongst the poor people, that I must necessarily miss you, and regret your absence when you are gone. There is no one in the place I am sure, who will not grieve over your departure."

He came round to where she sat, and stood close beside her.

"Shall I tell you, Miss Lennox? Shall I tell you, Blanche, *why* I am going?"

He had never called her by her Christian name before. Five minutes sooner Blanche would have been amazed at his doing so, now, she scarcely observed it.

"I hope it is not on Mrs. Woods' account?" she faltered. She knew it was not, but she scarcely knew what to say.

"It is on *your* account," answered Arthur, folding his arms, and drawing himself up to his full height. "On your account, because I dare not trust myself near you any longer, because I am such a poor weak wretch that I must tear myself away from the only spot on earth which has any attraction for me, lest I should go mad. Because I can no longer look upon you, listen to you, or be in your presence without feeling des-

perate and distracted. Because,—because I love you."

Every vestige of colour had faded from his features, and the effort with which he spoke was painfully evident.

Blanche rose up. She was perfectly calm now. She did not hesitate about what must be done, but her heart was full of pity for the pain which she was obliged to inflict.

"I am very very sorry for this, Mr. Woods," she said, and at once he saw there was no hope. "I cannot tell you what I would give for it not to have been so. I feel deeply, as any woman must do, the preference you have shewn me, but I much regret that you should have wasted a thought upon me in that way. Will you shake hands with me, and let me hope that I may keep you always as a friend?"

He seized her hand and pressed it passionately to his lips.

"I knew, I knew that it must be so," he cried. "I did not even dream for a moment that it could be otherwise, and I had not intended to say a word to you ever on the subject, but I could not help it. You asked me the reason for my going, and I have told you. Will you,—can you forgive me?"

Blanche held out her hand, and he again seized and pressed it fervently.

"God bless you, God bless you," he said,

"and think of me sometimes if you can, with pity."

She had sunk back into a chair, and turned away her head to conceal the tears which in spite of herself would come into her eyes. When she looked up again, he was gone.

A low old-fashioned door in the vestibule between the drawing-room and hall, led out into the garden. Through this the curate passed, and so left the house without Mrs. Gregory or Sidney's becoming aware of his departure.

Blanche got up and walked to the window. She saw him hurrying away in the distance, and a feeling of great tenderness towards him swelled up in her heart as she watched his retreating form. Not that she regretted what she had done, or the tone she had taken, but no woman can listen to a declaration of love, and especially for the first time, on the part of any man without being greatly moved. She blamed herself for having perhaps unconsciously encouraged this feeling which she was utterly powerless to return, but she could not remember when or in what way she had done so. So much that had puzzled her in the curate's conduct was now fully explained. His avoidance of her of late, his changed manner when they did meet, so different to what it had been. She understood it all, and she wondered in the simplicity of her heart, what there could have been about her that Arthur Woods had seen to love !

When Mrs. Gregory and Sidney entered the drawing-room, they were accompanied by Hester who had returned from the village.

"Is Mr. Woods gone?" exclaimed Mrs. Gregory, perceiving that Blanche was alone; "or what has become of him?" And she looked round the room as if she half suspected he was concealed under one of the chairs or sofas.

Blanche felt hysterical and gave a little laugh. Hester hurried up to her; with a woman's instinct she guessed what had happened.

"Do come upstairs with me for one minute, darling," she said, in a low tone, as Blanche looked at her, evidently unable to speak. Then as she hurried her from the room, she added, to her aunt, "Mr. Woods must have gone out by the garden. He often goes that way, and does not stand on ceremony as you know."

The old lady looked puzzled. She saw something was the matter, but could not make out what.

"If you are going for a walk you ought to start soon, my dears," she said. And then turning to Sidney, she began a long dissertation upon the relative merits of some china cups which Lady Frances had, and those which she had been showing him in a cabinet in the hall. Sidney did not care an atom about the china cups, but was impatient to depart, and wondered at the agitation which he

had noticed on Blanche's countenance, with a shrewd suspicion of the cause.

"Anyhow, it has come to nothing," he thought, "or the fellow would not have gone off in the way he has," and his spirits rose with the reflection.

When she went to her room that night, Blanche found a parcel and a note lying on her table. She opened the note and read as follows :

"When I think over what took place this afternoon, I reproach myself bitterly. It was such utter madness and presumption on my part to lift my eyes to you, and yet I cannot help feeling glad that you should know that I love you,—and what is more, shall love you and you only, as long as I live. All I ask is, that you will not forget me entirely, above all, that you will remember me in your prayers. During the short time that must elapse before I leave Wentmore, I shall not trust myself to see you again, or at any rate, if we meet it will be in the presence of others. I send you therefore now, a small parcel of books which was entrusted to me by a friend, for your brother Mr. Gerald Lennox. When I was in town in October last, he asked me as I was returning to Wentmore soon, if I would take charge of them, and deliver them to your brother in person. He explained to me that the books were not from himself but from Father Clifford, the Jesuit priest, who had received your brother into the Roman Church. My friend,

Storey, is himself a Roman Catholic, and often with Father Clifford, and when he heard him say that he wished to send the parcel to your brother by some safe means he offered to take charge of it as he knew I was in town, and should be returning to Wentmore almost immediately. I met him at the London Bridge Station that same night, and he gave me the parcel. He was going into the country by a late train, and I had just seen him off, and was leaving the station with the parcel under my arm, when I saw some one I thought must be your brother, enter the Terminus Hotel close by. Although much astonished at the coincidence, I ran after him thinking to execute my commission on the spot. I believe it really was he I saw, but owing to some mistake, the people at the hotel declared that the gentleman who had just gone in was a Mr. Stewart, and concluding I must have been misled by an accidental likeness I went away. When I returned here the next day, I found that your brother was gone abroad, and was not expected soon to return, so I put the parcel on one side intending to ask Lady Frances or yourself to take charge of it, and keep it or send it to him as you thought proper. In some way it slipped my memory however, and it was only when I heard of his late visit at the Rectory that I thought of it again. I send it therefore now to you, and I should wish to have the circumstances which led to my keeping it so long,

explained to him. I do not know why I have troubled you with this long story, but it is something to feel that I am writing to you,—that you will hold this paper in your hand—that you will read what I am writing, and I dare not write to you, save on indifferent subjects. I have no right to address you even upon those, but I wished you to know the history of the parcel, and I shall have no opportunity of telling it you otherwise. Oh! Blanche—for the last time, let me call you so, forgive me. God bless you always and for ever.

“A. W.”

Blanche read the letter, not without emotion, more than once. It was so unlike a love letter, and yet a deep despairing love breathed in every line. It was all about a parcel of books intended for her brother, and which, by accident, the writer had kept in his possession longer than he had intended, and still it touched her as a letter differently worded would not have done. It seemed to say in every word, “Let me write on. I am happy. I am writing to you. I will not offend you by saying a word more about myself than I can help, but whilst I write I can still feel that there is something passing between us. When I have done, it will all be over.”

She opened the parcel and examined the books.

They were controversial ones. On the Roman Catholic side, of course. She thought she would look at them again another time, and laid them aside for the present. That night she knelt long at her *Prie-Dieu*, and the name of Arthur Woods was not forgotten in her prayers.

CHAPTER XIII.

ARTHUR Woods did not remain at Wentmore many days after that interview with Blanche at Mrs. Gregory's. He pleaded his mother's increasing ill health, as a reason for hastening his departure, and persuaded Mr. Lennox to let him put in a substitute, until his permanent successor was appointed. Blanche had confided to her mother all that had passed between Arthur and herself, and Lady Frances had given her husband a hint upon the subject. Mr. Lennox did not know, however, that his curate had actually "spoken" to his daughter, and considered that the young man was behaving exceedingly well, in going away under the circumstances. He had shewn his good taste by falling in love with a girl in every way so charming as Blanche, and his good sense in going away, as soon as he had done so. Mr. Lennox was immensely proud of his family, and anything like a *mésalliance* was especially distasteful to him. He had inherited this feeling from his father,

although in his brother's case he had successfully combated the old man's prejudice on the subject. He would have considered it as the height of presumption on his curate's part, if he had seriously thought of aspiring to the hand of a Lennox, but Arthur Woods, a person of no family himself, knew his place, as the Rector mentally phrased it, too well to dream of anything of the sort, and had done quite the right thing in giving up his curacy, and placing himself beyond the reach of temptation as soon as possible. As to Blanche's feelings, Mr. Lennox did not entertain a moment's doubt. She had not encouraged the young man in any way, he was certain, and she had been too well brought up to think of marrying anyone out of her own "set." Besides, she was much too young to think about marrying at all, and with that reflection, her father dismissed any further consideration of her share in the question.

When it came to the parting, the Rector took leave of his young coadjutor with sincere regret. Lady Frances wrote him a kind note of farewell, the night before he left, and Hester Seymour and Barbara both gave him little remembrances of themselves and Wentmore to take away with him. Blanche acknowledged the receipt of his note, and the parcel for Gerald, but she did not send him any souvenir, and he understood her not doing so. Hester Seymour knew all about him and Blanche, and was exceedingly kind in her manner to him in

consequence, whenever they met during the few remaining days of his stay. She thought he had shewn his discrimination in preferring Blanche to herself, and was not in the least jealous. Whether Mrs. Gregory would have been equally magnanimous if she had known the truth, is doubtful, but she never guessed how matters really stood, and no one took the trouble to enlighten her. She carefully ascertained her favourite's future address, and resolved, since he must go, not to lose sight of him, let him go where he would.

So Arthur Woods left Wentmore, followed by the lamentations of the poor amongst whom he had laboured, and by the good wishes of all. He carried a heavy heart with him, and when he arrived at his mother's house in Dorset Square, his young unmarried sister, the only one left at home with the invalided widow, declared that he looked ten years older than when he was there last. He answered her observations with a melancholy smile, and said, he believed he had been overworking himself lately, and wanted rest. The next day he was so unlike himself, and seemed so low at one time and excited at another, that Miss Woods begged the medical man who was attending her mother to see him. The doctor no sooner took the young clergyman's hand in his, than he looked very grave, and ordered him at once to his bed.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I am afraid

you will have two patients now upon your hands instead of one."

And so it proved. For days and weeks Arthur Woods lay dangerously ill. The doctor shook his head, and the sister found her hands indeed full. But she was a brave little soul, and knew Where to look for support and strength under such trials. It was a weary and an anxious time, but at length, by slow degrees, he recovered. When once more allowed to leave his room and sit by his mother's side, whilst their tender little nurse hovered smiling round them both, he looked indeed the shadow of his former self.

Tidings of his illness reached Wentmore, and Mr. Lennox hastened up to town to assure Miss Woods of his sympathy. He had an interview with the doctor before he left, and gave that gentleman to understand that his bill for medical attendance was to be his affair entirely, and that Mrs. Woods, whose income he knew to be a limited one, was not to be held responsible for the same. Before leaving town he went to Grosvenor Square, and had a private conference with Mrs. Hastings, who was a great friend of his, and that good lady was careful to see that sundry delicacies of fruit and game found their way to Dorset Square at frequent intervals which were always left "By order," and the recipients (although the young lady had a guess upon the subject,) never knew exactly from whom their benefactions came.

When Lady Margaret Stewart returned to town early in February, she went constantly by her aunt's request to make enquiries at Mrs. Woods' door, and always reported the accounts to Wentmore afterwards. When these reports assumed a favourable tone, Blanche looked brighter than she had done since the news of Arthur's seizure first arrived. She had been miserable, thinking he might die, and then she should feel that she had been the cause of his death. She did not love, but she had always liked, the good, simple-hearted, hard-working young curate, and she could not bear to feel that she had however unwittingly and innocently brought all this trouble upon him. And so she was both glad and thankful when the accounts of his progress were confirmed, and she could put away the fear of any fatal issue to this unfortunate business from her mind.

In the meanwhile, Gerald and Ferdinand had spent a fortnight very pleasantly with their cousins in Norfolk, where a large party had assembled. Gerald had been able to form some pleasant Catholic acquaintances, Lord Dereham's Papistical neighbour having also a house-full during the Christmas season, and a good deal of intercourse being kept up between them. At the end of that time, Lord Norwood returned to town in order to concert certain important political measures, with his friends in the Upper House, before the meeting of Parliament, and the two brothers accompanied

him. Lord Norwood had more than once, endeavoured to elicit from Gerald some clue as to his future proceedings, but his nephew had been very reserved on that point, and only intimated his intention of returning to the continent for the present. "Going abroad for a time is all very well," the old lord observed to Ferdinand, after one of these unsatisfactory colloquies with his elder nephew, "especially as you tell me he has had this unexpected help from an unknown quarter. I wonder, by the way, who it can be? I know, I never had any such mysterious and timely windfalls when I was a youngster, and I wanted them badly enough at one time. But life on the continent is a desultory kind of thing if a fellow has nothing to do, and any *infra. dig.* employment would be worse than nothing. What I would do, if he would let me, is to arrange with his father that he should be started in some way in London, where he is known, and could get on, though goodness knows it is hard enough to get anything for anybody to do now-a-days, and there is his confounded religion in the way. Not but that I have influence enough I think, to help him over that difficulty, but somehow people *are* shy of Papists, and there is no denying it. Now Gerald is just the kind of fellow that would always be trying to make converts, I am afraid. Don't you think so? And people won't stand that you know."

Ferdinand assured his uncle that Gerald had not attempted anything of the sort with him, and that was all he could say upon the subject. Lord Norwood professed to be satisfied for the moment, but the next time he found himself alone with his daughter, he renewed his comments and misgivings as to Gerald's future well-doing. He liked to be told that he was distressing himself needlessly on that score, and from Lady Margaret he was sure to hear that.

The Lennoxes parted from their uncle at the Shoreditch terminus. "Give my love to them all," he said, as he stepped into the brougham which was awaiting his arrival, "and tell your mother I shall come down and see her before the Session begins, if I can get away for a day or two."

The evening of their return to Wentmore, Blanche established herself in a corner of the drawing-room with Gerald, and told him about the parcel Mr. Woods had entrusted to her for him, and how it had come into his possession. "I suppose it could not have been you he saw that night in London?" she said, as she finished her narrative.

"It was I, though, there is no doubt about that," answered Gerald. "Something possessed me not to give my real name when I went into the hotel, and that was how the mistake occurred. But now you may as well let me have my books.

They are some Father Clifford was anxious I should read, and as he promised me them a long time ago, I have been wondering why he did not send them. Woods expected to find me here, of course, or thought I should soon be coming down, I daresay, otherwise he would not have undertaken to deliver the parcel. Poor fellow, I was very sorry to hear of his having been so unwell. I suppose he overworked himself when here, though I should have hardly thought this place would have been too much for him."

Blanche coloured, and cast down her eyes, as she replied, "He was always so very unsparing of himself, and so devoted to the poor. I don't suppose he was as strong as he appeared." Then looking up, she added, playfully, "But as to the books, I am not going to let you have them just yet. I am beginning to read them myself, and as you have waited for them so long, you must just be content to wait a little longer. When I have done with them you shall have them."

She got up to give Lady Frances another cup of tea, as she spoke, and she did not see the look of love and hope combined which her brother cast upon her, as he thought of what might be the possible results of this study of Catholic writings on her part.

"Here is a note from Cissy Lethbridge," said Lady Frances, coming into the study, where the young people were assembled one day, after

luncheon. "She says she is coming over with her brother this afternoon, and wants to take Blanche and Bibi back with her, for a rehearsal of the charade this evening, and I suppose they will want some of you young men as well. When is it to be, darling?"

"The Wednesday of next week, I think, mamma," answered Blanche, to whom the query was addressed. "She told me there was to be a rehearsal to-night, but I forgot all about it. Of course, we shall want some men, and these creatures must all act. It was very sensible of Cissy to write and secure our being at home, for I was just going off to the Oaks with Gerald, and she would have been in despair if she had come and found us out. We put it off on purpose, till these two boys had come back, and Sidney's being here, too, is very fortunate. I remember his acting splendidly in a charade we had once."

Sidney protested that *he* could remember nothing of the sort, but Blanche refused to accept any excuses. Ferdinand declared he was ready to undertake any part at the shortest notice, and Gerald said something about his doubting if he should still be at Wentmore when the performance took place. Blanche begged them not to go out until the Lethbridges had been, and then departed with Lady Frances and Barbara, to arrange about various important matters in the wardrobe department.

As soon as they were gone, Sidney proposed cigars and a stroll, remarking, that as he did not know the Lethbridges, he did not care about waiting in for them, but the brothers preferred seeing their friends, and assured him that Charles Lethbridge was a capital fellow, whom he was certain to like, and that his sister was, "though not what you would call exactly good-looking," one of the nicest girls in the world, but they could not prevail upon him to remain, and so having 'lighted up,' he departed for a solitary ramble.

Gerald had not seen the Lethbridges for some time, but they were great friends of his, and in the pleasure of meeting again, both he and they lost sight of the embarrassment they had expected to feel on the occasion of their first *rencontre* after his change of communion had been made known. Cissy and Blanche were immense allies, and the former had mingled her tears with those of Gerald's sister, when talking of the sorrow which had come upon them all in consequence of the step he had taken, but she did not think of this when Gerald advanced with his bright friendly smile to meet her, as she and her brother were shown into the room. Charles had declared when he first heard of Gerald's having become a Roman Catholic, that it did not signify to him what he was. They had been friends as long as he could remember, had gone to the same school, and been together during their holidays, and although Gerald

was older than Charles, and during their boyish days the difference in age was more strongly marked than a few years later, young Lethbridge had always entertained that half-admiring, half-respectful regard for the "bigger" boy, which young lads feel when attached to those who are a little older than themselves. They had much to talk about now, it being some time since they had met, and anyone who had seen the merry group conversing together, would scarcely have guessed that Cissy Lethbridge, whose laugh was one of the loudest, whilst her good-natured face was lighted up with pleasure, as she discussed the coming theatrical performance with Blanche and Barbara, was thinking all the time, "And he is really a Roman Catholic! really a Roman Catholic!" which, however, was the case. As for Charles, he did not once remember anything about it, and if he had, it would not have made the slightest difference to him, or taken one atom from the pleasure he felt at meeting his old friend again.

Ferdinand sat on a couch in the centre of the room, with the young ladies in a semi-circle before him, discussing the charade and everything connected with it *con amore*. He was a first-rate actor, and enjoyed anything of the kind amazingly. The other two young men had withdrawn a little to one side, and Gerald was inquiring after some

of his quondam London acquaintances, whom he had lost sight of lately.

They were all laughing and talking busily when the door was opened, and Mr. and Mrs. Fraser Smith and the Miss Fraser Smiths were announced. Blanche rose to receive the new comers, whilst Cissy exclaimed, "This is very good ! we shall have all our *corps dramatique* presently."

Bella and Minnie were the two who had occupied the front seat in the barouche that afternoon, and as they were to take some trifling part in the Lethbridge performances, they were received with open arms. Blanche left the room, saying, "I will tell mamma that you are here," to Mrs. Smith, as she passed. Gerald came forward to do the honours to Mr. Smith, and Charles helped Ferdinand to entertain the young ladies.

The Smith party were all loud in their expressions of delight at seeing Gerald again. During his fortnight's stay at Wentmore before Christmas, he had not called upon any of his old friends in the neighbourhood, and it was only after his departure that his return to England had become generally known. His conversion and the different reports current as to his loss of fortune or otherwise, had made him the general talk of that part of the world for some time, so that he was quite a lion now that he had re-appeared amongst them. Mrs. Fraser Smith's greeting was motherly in its warmth. Her husband's manner, always

rather pompous towards young people, lost something of its usual stiffness as he shook hands with this "wrong-headed and deluded" young fellow, as he had termed him, when speaking to others of Gerald's secession from the Established Church. The sisters were truly pleased to see him again, and showed that they were so, and if a little deeper flush tinged Miss Minnie's cheek than was perceptible on Bella's when they assured him how glad they were to have him once more amongst them, it passed unnoticed, or at most was only attributed to the warmth of the room after coming out of the cold air.

Lady Frances came down stairs with Blanche, as soon as she heard of the descent from the Oaks, and Mrs. Smith immediately established herself by her side on the little sofa which was particularly her own, on the left of the fireplace, congratulating her on having all her children around her once more, and assuring her in a low confidential tone, that she quite understood and felt for her and Mr. Lennox, at the same time, under the trial it must be to them both, of feeling that dear Gerald was no longer the same way of thinking with themselves on the most important of all subjects, "which, now that he is with you, must, of course, be brought more home to you," she added.

"It never rains but it pours," observed Barbara to her cousin Ferdinand in a low tone, as she

heard the front door bell again ring. "There is some one else calling now!"

"Is Mr. Graham still with you, Blanche?" enquired Bella Smith, during a momentary lull in the conversation.

"Yes," answered Blanche, "and I have been telling him he must take part in the charade at Lethbridge, as I know he can act very well if he chooses. He is out somewhere, and will be sorry not to have seen you, I am sure."

"Oh! I don't suppose he will care about not having seen *us*," returned Bella, pointedly. "We all say he has no eyes for anyone beyond the Rectory!"

Blanche felt that she coloured, and was annoyed with herself for doing so. Before she could make any rejoinder, the door was thrown open, and a party of ladies entered. Mrs. Gregory, Miss Seymour, and Miss Jones.

Lady Frances did not hear the names as they were announced, and looked up rather bewildered. Mrs. Gregory, on seeing the room so full of people, paused, and looked as if she would like to have beaten a retreat, had it been possible to do so. Blanche got up and said, "Mrs. Gregory, darling," to Lady Frances, as she went forward to meet the old lady who then advanced, and Mrs. Smith, on seeing her, rose to make room on the sofa for her beside Lady Frances.

"I consider that we are quite in luck," said

Mrs. Smith, approaching the merry group at the further end of the room, where Hester Seymour had already been pulled down on a seat beside Miss Minnie. "I think I heard you say, dear Blanche, that your cousin was still with you, and if so, you will be able to bring us three young men for our party on the twenty-fourth. I put it off a day or two on purpose not to interfere with Mrs. Lethbridge. And how long are you going to stay, Gerald?" she continued, placing herself on a low chair by his side, and thereby interrupting a long speech of her husband's, who was favouring Gerald with his opinion as to the duty of the ministry during the coming session.

"I don't know exactly," he said, in reply to Mrs. Smith's interrogation, "but I don't suppose I shall be here for your party. You will have quite enough young men without me."

"Oh, nonsense, now Gerald, you know quite well you can stay if you choose, and no one understands their own value in a ball room better than you do. We can't let you off, and there is an end of it. If you can stay for the party at Lethbridge, you can remain for ours."

Gerald did not argue the point, but inwardly resolved that he would suit himself about staying or not. At that moment he rather thought he should do so. He enjoyed a party where he knew everyone in the room, and he had not been to

anything of the sort in the neighbourhood of Wentmore for a long time.

Presently, Mrs. Fraser Smith rose to take leave.

"We dine at the General's to-night. Are you going?" she said to Lady Frances, as she shook hands.

General Ravenscliff was an old officer, who lived at the further end of Wentmore parish. His wife, latterly a great invalid, was an old friend of Lady Frances Lennox's, who remembered her a bright, high-spirited girl, and the belle of the county in which she was born. Mrs. Ravenscliff was the reverse of all this now. She had lost her only child when he was a boy at school, and she had never recovered the grief and shock which her maternal heart then sustained. The General's health, too, had failed considerably of late years, and Mrs. Ravenscliff was often called upon to nurse him, when she required nursing herself. However, she was gentleness and meekness itself, and never complained.

Lady Frances, who knew more than most people what were the trials of her hidden life, had never heard a murmur or word of repining fall from her lips. Mrs. Ravenscliff often said that the happiest day she had known for years, was when she heard that Mr. Lennox was coming to Wentmore Rectory, and her greatest earthly solace since then had been the companionship and sympathy of her old friend.

"Yes, we are going," answered Lady Frances, "though Mr. Lennox does not much like taking the horses out at night, such weather as this. Do you suppose it will be a large party?"

"I don't know, I daresay it will be. The General keeps a good table, and people like being asked to his dinners." Then, in a low voice, Mrs. Smith added, "But I advise you not to take Gerald. He has the greatest horror of Romanists, and made Mrs. Ravenscliff take Gerald's photograph out of her book, when he heard that he had become one!"

Lady Frances smiled, but said nothing. She did not deem it necessary to assure Mrs. Smith that Gerald was not likely to go anywhere where he would not be welcome.

As Minnie Smith passed the chair on which Miss Jones was seated, the latter reminded her of her promise to spend the evening at Rose Cottage, (which was the name of Miss Jones's residence,) as her papa and mamma and sisters were going out to dinner. Minnie assured her that she had not forgotten, and would be with her in good time.

"The carriage will take me to you, as soon as it has come back from the General's," she said.

They were very happy and comfortable, those two at Rose Cottage that evening. Happy, that is, in a melancholy sort of way; but with very young ladies, to be a little sad and out of spirits

at times is no sign of unhappiness; quite the reverse. Life, to them, would be deprived of half its charms, if it were not for the clouds which often dwell on their horizon and necessitate an unburdening of the gentle sorrow which for the moment is uppermost to some sympathetic and chosen friend. Now, Minnie Smith's sorrow, with the nature of which the reader is already acquainted, was of no imaginary kind, and the meeting with Gerald which had taken place that day, had revived its memory in full force. Her one confidante was Arabella Jones. This good soul had penetrated the young girl's secret even before she had told her with many sighs and tears and blushes, together with earnest injunctions to secrecy, how the matter stood with her, and "Do you think he cares for me at all, dear Miss Jones? just the very least bit? and do you think if he did, that papa would ever let us marry on a small income? I should not care how small it was," were questions with which poor Minnie was forever plying her faithful friend.

But Miss Jones could not give her any hope on either of these points. "I don't think Mr. Gerald Lennox, at present, thinks about marrying anyone, and I have never seen any symptoms in his manner of a more tender feeling than friendship and regard for you, my darling," she would say, "and it would be wrong of me not to tell you so. As to Mr. Fraser Smith, I am quite sure he would

not hear of your engagement to a poor man, even if Mr. Gerald were to propose; and much as he would like such a connection, you know his horror of Roman Catholics, and that alone would be sufficient to make him oppose the idea of any of his children marrying one."

But Minnie was not satisfied with these reasonings, and always endeavoured to bring Miss Jones round to her way of looking at the subject.

On this occasion the usual little plaints were uttered by Minnie, and the same arguments repeated by Miss Jones. It comforted Minnie to pour forth all her hopes and fears and misgivings into her friend's sympathetic ear, and when eleven o'clock struck, and the carriage came for her, she kissed and thanked her as if she had been able to give her all the hope and encouragement she wished.

And when Minnie was gone, and Arabella Jones had returned to her little sitting-room, having closed and fastened the front door of her cottage, her one little maid of all work having been dismissed an hour ago to bed, she fell on her knees, and hid her face in her hands, and sobbed as if her heart was breaking with a hopeless love, instead of that of the young girl who had just left her. Indeed Minnie's heart was, although truly and sadly troubled at times, not at all in a breaking condition, but in seeking sympathy and counsel from this lone and maiden soul, she had

come to one who was able most fully to bestow the first at any rate. Long she knelt and wept, and every now and then burst out into moans and lamentations which were piteous in their nature.

"Another! and she so young, poor thing! to be tried in the same way! and to end the same again! Oh! who should feel for her if I do not!" And then she pulled forth from its hiding place within the bosom of her dress, a locket, within which was enclosed a lock of hair, and it was pressed fondly again and again to her lips. "And that it should be one of his family, and so like him, too, how strange! how strange! Poor Minnie, may God help her, poor child!" she murmured, as she replaced the locket within her dress. And then Arabella Jones arose and dried her tears, and walked with a stern and composed look into her bed-room, and knelt in long and earnest prayer before she sought her pillow that night.

Gerald did not form one of the party to the General's. Blanche and Ferdinand accompanied their father and mother, and he remained at home with Barbara and Sidney. When Barbara had retired, and the two young men were sitting over their wine after dinner, Gerald observed, "I shall stay here for the Lethbridge's party, Sid, and as soon as that is over, I shall start for Brussels. I have told my father that I intend to remain there until I find something to do, and he said he thought I was the best judge of what course I

ought to pursue. I had destroyed my own life, as it were, and must carve out a new path for myself, the best way I could. I told him of the money which had so unexpectedly been placed at my disposal, and that he need have no anxiety about me on that score. What are you thinking of doing yourself?"

Sidney coloured up, and hesitated a moment. Then filling up his glass, he answered, "Well, I have been so jolly and comfortable here, that I shall be very sorry to leave Wentmore, but, of course, I must be going soon, and I shall come to Brussels and look after you, old fellow, when I do. I suspect you will have had enough of the Belgians after a time, and then you will be glad to return to London with me. Between us we shall find something for you to do there, you may depend upon it."

Gerald shook his head and changed the subject by telling Sidney he would certainly have to act in the forthcoming charade at Lethbridge. Sidney declared that nothing should induce him to do so, and after a lively discussion on the subject, as neither of them were drinking any more wine, Gerald proposed that they should rejoin Bibi in the drawing-room.

However, Sidney did act, and he and Ferdinand were pronounced admirable performers by an admiring audience, when the Lethbridge entertainment came off a few days later. Gerald stayed for

it, as he said he should, but did not take any part in the performance, although he willingly lent his aid as prompter and helper in general, behind the scenes.

The next day he left Wentmore, and his mother and Blanche watched his departure with streaming eyes. Ferdinand accompanied him to London, where he was to remain a few days before going on to Brussels. The brothers took up their quarters in Grosvenor Square, as Lord Norwood insisted upon their being his guests during their stay in town. Ferdinand returned to Oxford the day before Gerald was to cross over, and the latter having made all his preparations for departure, was sitting alone in his uncle's library, an hour or so after his brother had left, when a carriage drove up to the door, and a servant entered to say, "A lady wished to speak to Mr. Gerald Lennox, if he would be good enough to step out for one minute."

It was getting dark, and Gerald supposed it must be some friend of his cousin Margaret's on her way home, who had called to leave some message for her, and asked to see him as one of the family on hearing that he was within.

"Don't you know who it is?" he asked of the servant, as he went out into the hall.

"No sir. The lady did not give any name. She asked if Mr. Gerald Lennox was at home, and

said she wished to speak to him if he would be kind enough to come out."

Gerald was astonished. He was not aware that any of his lady friends knew of his being in town at all. He had only seen a few men at his club since he had been up. In another minute, having snatched up his hat, he was standing by the carriage door, and speaking to—Mrs. Fraser Smith.

"Are you alone? Is anyone else at home?" asked that lady, after the first salutations and expressions of surprise on Gerald's part at seeing her were over.

"Ferdinand is gone, and my uncle is out," answered Gerald. "Won't you come in?"

Mrs. Smith said she was in a great hurry, but would come in for one minute, as she wished to speak to him, and Gerald led the way into his uncle's dining-room.

She explained when the door was shut, and Gerald had established her in an arm chair by the fire, that she was in town for a day's shopping, getting things for their party which were wanted at the last moment, and was going back again by the late train that night. She was vehement in her entreaties to Gerald, to come down for her ball, but he assured her that it would be quite impossible for him to do so. Her manner, at first, was most affectionate, but when she found that he was immovable on that point, she began discussing his religious change, and said one or

two things of so sharp and reprehensive a nature, that Gerald told her, if she had not been so old a friend, he could not have allowed her to speak to him in such a way. Then suddenly changing her tone once more, Mrs. Smith called him her "dear boy!" her "poor Gerald," and getting up to take leave, said that she should still hope to see him at her party. Gerald escorted her to her carriage, and told her to give all sorts of kind messages from him to all at home. "Ah! you and my dear girls were always such great friends," were her last words. "Well! I had hoped——" But here she stopped suddenly, and holding out her hand, squeezed Gerald's expressively. Then, having given the necessary direction to the coachman, she drove off, leaving Gerald to ruminate on her last words at his leisure.

CHAPTER XIV.

GERALD watched the carriage turn the corner of the Square, and then walked back into the dining-room. Closing the door, and drawing a chair towards the fire, he sat down with a thoughtful and troubled expression of countenance. But he did not remain seated long. Starting up, he began pacing the room to and fro, with folded arms, and rapid strides, every now and then stopping and muttering to himself, and then resuming his tread up and down the apartment. It was not only the parting words of Mrs. Fraser Smith which disturbed him, but something she had said during her visit, and which, taken in connection with that half-spoken sentence of hers, as she drove off, came back to him with a meaning which at the time he had not attached to it.

She had questioned him about his pecuniary affairs, and excused herself for doing so by reminding him of how very old a friend she was, and how naturally and truly interested she was in

all that concerned him. He had responded briefly, merely assuring her that for the present he had no anxiety on that score, although he had entirely forfeited the Newcome property, and no longer derived any benefit from that whatever.

It was her rejoinder to this statement on his part which now recurred to him, and made him clench his hands with vehemence, whilst the blood mounted up into his brow. With what he now fancied had been a peculiar meaning, she had said, "Perhaps I know a little more about some things than you imagine. It is not everyone who is assisted when they are in need, as you have been ! You are a lucky fellow, but you deserve whatever good fortune may befall you, Gerald. Your friends are true ones, and you have not one who takes a deeper interest in you than myself." He hardly noticed the words at the moment, and they would probably have escaped his memory entirely, had it not been for that parting insinuation which had so taken him by surprise, but which clearly shewed him that Mrs. Fraser Smith would not have objected to him as a son-in-law at one time, even if she considered him as no longer eligible at the present moment.

The more he thought of it, the more convinced he became, that these words of hers bore some allusion to that mysterious godsend which he had experienced some weeks before, in Brussels. He wondered that it had not struck him at the time ;

it seemed so evident when he came to think about it, and yet how could she possibly have become acquainted with what was known to so few besides himself? He was quite sure that none of his family would have mentioned it, and from what other quarter could she have gained her information? It was at this point of his reflections that the idea flashed across him that she might herself be in some way concerned with the donation. She had money of her own, he knew, although he did not imagine, or at any rate, never had imagined, that she had the uncontrolled disposal of it or of any part of it. He would never have supposed such a thing for a moment, had it not been for that half-spoken hint about one of her daughters, but if she had wished, or did wish to secure him for one of them, then, how better could she effect her object than by placing him under such a debt of gratitude to her personally,—and the thought was unendurable.

But no, it was impossible. She must have alluded to something else, or he must have mistaken her words. At any rate, he would write again that very night to the bankers, and endeavour once more to elicit from them the name of his unknown benefactor. Upon one thing he was quite resolved. No earthly consideration should induce him to touch another farthing of the money, until he did know from whence it came. And if it was from the quarter he sus-

pected, it should be returned in full, of that he was quite determined.. For one minute he thought of writing to Mrs. Fraser Smith, and asking her point blank if his suspicions were correct, but he saw at once that that would not do. It would be the greatest mistake on his part to allow her to think he could have supposed such a thing possible. Sitting down, therefore, without further hesitation, he wrote a hasty line to his bankers, begging them to reconsider their determination of leaving him in ignorance as to whence the sum proceeded about which they had written to him at Brussels, urging them in the strongest terms to obtain leave to acquaint him with the name of the donor, and requesting that they would direct their reply to Brussels.

The day after his return to his old quarters in the Belgian capital, the answer arrived. Messrs. D. and Co. quite understood Mr. Gerald Lennox's anxiety to ascertain to whom he was indebted for the sum to which he referred, and which they had had the honour of placing to his account, but they regretted their inability to comply with his request. The information he required was not theirs to impart, and therefore, however reluctantly, they were compelled to withhold it.

After the receipt of this communication, Gerald took one day to consider his plans for the future, and then proceeded to carry them out. When Sidney Graham, (having torn himself most reluc-

tantly from the charms of Wentmore, where, however, he felt that he had remained an unconscionable time,) arrived at the door of Gerald's former lodgings in the Rue d'Edimbourg, he was informed that "Monsieur" had left some days before, and had gone to the Rue d'Idalie, in the Quartier Leopold. He remembered that Blanche had told him something about Gerald's change of address, but it had slipped his memory, and wondering why his cousin had given up the pleasant little apartment, where he had found himself so comfortable heretofore, he desired the driver to take him to the street in which Gerald's new abode was situated.

The Rue d'Idalie is a small street near the Luxembourg Station, and at the door of one of the smallest houses in it, Sidney's cab stopped. At first, he thought he must have mistaken the number, but upon inquiry, he was informed that a "Monsieur Lennocks" resided there, and he was shewn into a back room on the ground floor. There he found Gerald seated at a table covered with books and papers, and straining his eyes in the endeavour to read small print by the fast disappearing light at the window.

In answer to Sidney's interrogations and exclamations of surprise, Gerald told him to dismiss his *vigilante* for the present, and to sit down whilst he explained to him the state of affairs. A very few words sufficed for this. Having made up his

mind not to touch another penny of that money, about which Sidney knew, and which was all he had in the world to call his own, he found himself literally penniless, and dependent on his own exertions for his daily bread. He had therefore given up his lodgings in the Rue d'Edimbourg, and come to this cheaper and more secluded abode, where he had a couple of rooms, and the good people of the house boarded him for a moderate sum per week. The vicinity of his friend, Mr. Fitzroy, who lived close by, was an inducement to him to seek that especial *locale*, and through the kind exertions of the Abbé Beaufort, he had been fortunate enough to obtain a place in one of the colleges as English and classical master, which gave him several hours of occupation during the day. "And I have also been entrusted with the translation of some French and German theological works into English, by one of the principal publishers in the place, on behalf of his London correspondent," he added, "so my dear Sid, you see that I am fully employed, and am getting on famously. I am entirely independent, which is the great thing, and as long as I can earn enough to support myself decently, that is all I care about. If you are going to stay here, you must find lodgings for yourself somewhere else, but, whenever you feel inclined to look me up, I shall be delighted to see you. You will always find me here, for I know no one, I may say, and go nowhere. I have neither the

means nor the time for amusements, and my one piece of dissipation is a stroll in the Zoological Gardens when the weather is fine, and I have half an hour to spare. Stand out of my light, now, there's a good fellow, for I can't afford much candle, and am obliged to make the daylight last as long as it will."

In vain Sidney stormed and urged. In vain he remonstrated and ridiculed. Gerald was firm, and his cousin departed to seek accommodation for himself elsewhere, declaring that he should send word by that very night's post to England, of what Gerald was about, and he knew that neither Mr. Lennox nor Ferdinand would let him go on in that way. At this threat, Gerald smiled, but offered no reply.

When the Rector of Wentmore and the young Oxonian had been given to understand that Gerald was really working hard for his living in a foreign city, they were much startled by the intelligence. Mr. Lennox was indignant at his son's folly, and considered this disregard of the money, which had been, as he thought, so providentially sent him as only on a par with the rest of the conduct which had vexed him so greatly. Ferdinand wrote letters of strong remonstrance on the subject, and as soon as he could do so, came over personally to ascertain how matters stood. He joined his entreaties with those of Sidney, to induce his brother to avail himself of at least some small portion of

the money at his bankers, but his efforts were unavailing. Before he left Brussels, he came to a private understanding with the people of the house in the Rue d'Idalie, which resulted in Gerald's table being rather better supplied than it would otherwise have been at the low rate of payment Gerald could afford; and he departed again for England with feelings divided between regret for the privations to which one brought up as Gerald had been, was exposed, and admiration for the independent spirit which prompted his brother to act as he was doing.

Lady Frances and Blanche wrote imploringly to Gerald on the subject of his new mode of life, but he only returned laughing replies, assuring them that he was as jolly as possible, and wanted for nothing. His father informed him that one hundred a year would be placed to his account at his (Mr. Lennox's) bankers, and he was at liberty to draw upon it if he chose, but although Gerald expressed his sense of his father's consideration, he left the money untouched in the same way as he had done the larger sum. And so the time passed on. Gerald remained at Brussels happy and contented, with his time fully occupied, and the consciousness, which to him was so sweet, of being indebted entirely to his own exertions for support. Ferdinand paid him another visit at Easter, and could not but allow that he seemed to thrive and prosper in the path he had marked out

for himself. "He has religious advantages of all kinds," wrote the younger brother of the elder to Blanche, "and on that score is very much to be envied. He is as cheerful as possible, and although not so smart in his attire as of old, is, as I am sure you will believe, the same perfect gentleman in appearance in the class-room, as he was in the first *salons* of London in his prosperous days."

Sidney Graham returned with Ferdinand to England, after this second visit of his to his brother. Brussels was getting dull, and he was tired of it altogether. The idle sort of life and the pleasant acquaintances he had picked up, both amongst his own country-people and the natives, had made it enjoyable for a time, but of Gerald's society, which had been his first inducement in coming over to Brussels, he had had but little latterly, so he announced his intention of accompanying Ferdinand when the latter departed upon his return journey, and they travelled back together.

Summer came, and found Sidney Graham once more domesticated at Wentmore Rectory. Ferdinand was at home for a short time, but had arranged to pass the greater part of this his last long vacation with a cramming tutor at the lakes. He therefore advised his mother and the young ladies to make the most of him whilst he was with them. It was partly on account of his expected

absence that Lady Frances had asked Sidney back to Wentmore so soon, as she had been very anxious of late about Blanche, and wished her to have as much cheerful companionship as possible. Ferdinand's loss was a serious one, and Sidney had made himself so agreeable during his stay at Christmas, that it was unanimously voted that he should be asked again. If Lady Frances had been questioned, she would have found it difficult to say what made her uneasy about her darling.

Blanche did not complain, nor apparently was there anything about her to cause uneasiness to a casual observer, but the mother's vigilant eye and watchful scrutiny discovered what with another might have passed unobserved. She had noticed that her child's spirits were at times unusually depressed, and again that she would become quite excited about a trifle which seemed to call for no particular interest. Often she would appear lost in thought, and had to be spoken to more than once, before she seemed to hear what was said, and this, with Blanche, was something quite new. Once or twice, Lady Frances had surprised her in tears, and when questioned anxiously as to the cause, she had returned evasive answers or else laughed it off. Mr. Lennox would ask his wife, at times, what was the reason of Miss Blanche's high spirits, he thought from her manner that she must have heard something exhilarating, but it never appeared that such was

the case, and an hour or so after, some one else would observe that "They hoped the post had brought no bad news that morning, but Blanche seemed very much depressed."

At first, the mother treated the matter lightly, and thought nothing of it. Then she began to fancy that her child might be entertaining some feeling of regret about Arthur Woods, and the thought troubled her a good deal. However, a conversation she had with Barbara on the subject, completely reassured her on that point, and for a time she succeeded in persuading herself that she had been anxious without a cause. But as time passed on, her misgivings returned. She consulted Mr. Findlay, the family doctor, who had known Blanche almost since her infancy, about her, and he recommended plenty of cheerful society and change of scene. It was therefore arranged that Lady Frances should accept her brother's repeated invitation, and take her daughter up to town for the remainder of the season, which was then at its height.

In the meanwhile, such diversions as could be contrived, and were within reach at Wentmore, were eagerly sought for, on account of her child, by the anxious mother. Croquet parties and meetings for the practice of archery at the different houses in the neighbourhood were the order of the day. People were asked to stay in the house, and poor Blanche was allowed little peace,

night or morning. All protestation and assurance on her part that she infinitely preferred being left quiet and alone was disregarded. She was told that she did not know what was good for her, and must submit, like a dutiful child, to be guided by others. Barbara enjoyed this change in the usually monotonous life at Wentmore, and encouraged the idea of its being necessary on Blanche's account. She was not going to London herself, but had accepted an invitation to spend a few weeks with some friends in Warwickshire. Mr. Lennox was to accompany his wife and daughter to town, returning every Saturday to Wentmore for the duty on Sunday, and leaving the curate, who had succeeded Arthur Woods, in charge of the parish during the week.

Sidney Graham had not been long at Wentmore before he remarked, in common with others, the change that had come over his cousin Blanche. She was even more charming, he thought, if that were possible, than before, but something evidently was on her mind, and he, too, could not help tormenting himself with the idea that the *ci-devant* curate had to do with it. Yes, it had come to that with him, now. It was absolute torment to him to think that she could care for anyone else, sufficiently to make herself unhappy on their account, (and he had heard of Arthur Woods's dangerous illness in town,) for he looked upon

such concern as indicative of a tenderer feeling still.

During his stay at Wentmore in the winter, he had become more and more struck by the winning beauty of this young creature, and the cousinly footing they were on, made it all the more impossible for him to resist the sweet influence of her manner and charms. The time which had elapsed since then, had in no wise diminished the effect which her attractions had had upon him, and he only wondered on his return that he could have endured to be absent from her so long. It was not to be supposed that his evident admiration for his fair young cousin would pass unobserved, and the subject was canvassed very freely in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Lethbridge was asked if it was true that Miss Lennox was engaged to her cousin, Mr. Graham, and it was only upon the strength of her positive assertion that she knew such was not the case, that the report was discredited.

The only people who seemed unaware of the state of Sidney's feelings, were, as is often the case, those most concerned themselves. Lady Frances Lennox was so accustomed to the admiration which her child excited in everyone who came near her, that no expression of the kind on Sidney's part, however enthusiastic, would ever have seemed extraordinary to her. In the same way, Mr. Lennox would not have thought it remarkable

if his nephew had chanted his daughter's praises from morning till night. He considered her perfect himself, and took it for granted that everyone else thought the same. Ferdinand noticed that Sidney was never so happy as when by Blanche's side, but only set it down in his own mind to their being very "thick" together, as he would have expressed it; and as it usually fell to his lot to act as Barbara's cavalier when the quartette went anywhere together, he thought it quite natural that Sid should offer like attentions to Blanche. Barbara, who as the only other young lady in the house, would naturally have been supposed to be more wide awake than other people on the subject of anyone's attentions to Blanche, was too much occupied with her own affairs to pay much attention to those of her cousin. When Ferdinand was at the Rectory, she seemed quite to agree with him that Sidney ought to attend to Blanche, in the same way that she expected him to look after her.

One afternoon, when Sidney found himself in the drawing-room alone with Barbara for a few minutes, he asked her whether there was anything going on between Blanche and "that fellow, Woods," who had been his uncle's curate the last time he was down there. She laughingly inquired what could have put such an idea into his head, and told him that although she believed poor Mr. Woods had been very much 'smitten' by Blanche,

there was certainly no feeling on her side beyond kindness and friendship for him. "Aunt Lennox has been cross-questioning me on the same subject," she added. "I suppose it is Blanche's pale face which has put it into your heads that she is pining in secret after some one. I don't know if it is so or not, but I am sure she is not breaking her heart about Mr. Woods."

Sidney was quite satisfied, and did not object to the idea of Blanche's being pensive about *some one*, as that someone might possibly be himself!

Lady Frances had a little sanctum of her own, which communicated with the library by means of a blind door in the book-case; it was a favourite retreat of both her's and Blanche's, and the latter was accustomed to spend a good part of the morning in this room, drawing, or practising on the cottage piano which stood at one end of it. She had been complaining of a little headache on the morning after the conversation between her two cousins which we have mentioned, and announced her intention after luncheon of remaining at home to nurse herself for the evening, when a few people were coming to dinner, instead of going out with Lady Frances in the carriage, as she usually did.

As the day was fine, Ferdinand and Barbara had arranged an expedition on horseback, which they invited Sidney to join, but he was suddenly seized with a conviction that he ought to write some business letters to his lawyers in London

and his agent in Scotland, which it would be impossible for him to put off, and said he should remain at home for that purpose, and take a stroll by himself later in the day. Mr. Lennox accompanied his wife in the carriage to Westling, as he wished to consult the vicar about some clerical meeting which was soon to be held in the Deanery, and the equestrians followed the carriage to the gate, Mr. Lennox warning them that they might expect to be caught in the rain if they went very far. Barbara laughed, declared it would hold fine, and kissed her hand to her uncle and aunt, as she and her companion cantered off in an opposite direction, to that in which the carriage was going.

Sidney went upstairs to write, and Blanche established herself in the little morning room to which we have referred. She had thrown herself on a sofa, and after making her head worse by trying to read, lay with half-closed eyes and her head upon the cushion, enjoying the breeze which gently played upon her cheek from the open window. Suddenly she was startled from her repose by hearing the door opened; and looking up, she saw her cousin Sidney standing in the doorway, and exclaimed—

“ Is that you? I thought you had gone out. You won’t disturb me, so pray come in, only you must forgive my being stupid and not talking much, as my head is still rather bad.”

Sidney did not wait for a second invitation, but muttering something about having got through his letters and not caring to go out just yet, he drew a chair near her sofa and sat down. Blanche thought that he had taken up a book, and once more closing her eyes, attempted to sleep, but a movement on her cousin's part presently caused her to look up, and she noticed that he was not reading, but sitting back in his chair with folded arms, and his eyes fixed upon her.

"You idle boy," she said, smiling, "why don't you read or do something? I wish you would not stare at me like that. I know my hair is tumbled and must look very untidy, but I can't help it; I prefer comfort to appearances." And she nestled her head down again on her cushion as she spoke.

"Blanche," said Sidney, without changing his attitude in the slightest degree, "are you one of those women who pretend that they do not know they are beautiful?"

"Oh dear no," answered Blanche rather snapishly, for she did not like being disturbed. "I was always very conceited, and inclined to admire myself rather than otherwise. But pray don't talk of me as a 'woman,' it sounds so big, and not the least like me."

"As to that," rejoined her cousin, "I am very much of the same opinion. You are much more like an angel than a woman."

There was something in the tone of his voice as he said these words, an undefinable something which caused Blanche to open her eyes and look at him.

"Give me the Eau de Cologne please, and don't be silly," she replied.

Sidney got up, took the scent bottle from the table, and held it out to her. She looked at him gravely as she took it from him, poured some of its contents over her handkerchief, and then returning it, said, "Thank you."

He replaced the bottle on the table and sat down again.

"Are you not going out for a walk?" she asked presently, as Sidney continued gazing at her as before, and she began to feel uncomfortable under the process. "It is a shame to waste all this fine afternoon indoors."

"I am going out presently," returned Sidney. "Just now, I prefer sitting here with you. You do not know what a happiness it is to me to be near you, Blanche. I should like to be so always."

She did not feel inclined to go to sleep now. She did not like the turn the conversation was taking, and wished Sidney had gone out riding with the others. But if he was inclined to be serious she was not.

"You would get dreadfully tired of me, my dear Sid," she said, shaking her head, "and if

you did not, I am sure I should of you. I never like being with the same person too much at any time."

"Don't say that."

"But I do say it, and I mean it; and if you can possibly take a hint, I think you might understand such a broad one as that, sir."

"Blanche, listen to me. I am not joking——"

"My dear cousin, I cannot listen to anything. I told you I was not in a talkative mood, and if I do not have a little sleep I shall not get rid of my headache. If you wish me to be decently civil or agreeable to anyone this evening, you will go away now like a good boy and leave me to myself."

"I will go away presently, when I have said what I have to say. I have been thinking a good deal about it lately, Blanche,"—here he took up an ivory pen-knife from the table, and began playing with it rather nervously, "and I believe that we might be very happy together, if you would—would be my wife."

The last words came out with a sort of jerk. He then laid down the paper knife, and got up and stood before her with a smile of expectation upon his lips.

Blanche smiled too, as she raised her eyes to his.

"I am sorry your thoughts should have taken so foolish a turn of late, my dear Sidney," she said. "I hope that you and your wife, whoever she

may be, will be very happy together some day, but I shall always be able to cast a little damp over her spirits when they become uproarious, by telling her that you *seriously* thought of asking me to occupy that position once," and she broke into a merry laugh as she spoke.

Sidney seized her hand and held it within his own. In one moment his manner changed, as he saw that she did not believe him to be in earnest.

"Blanche, my angel, my love, I mean what I say. Do not trifle with me, but tell me. May I—dare I hope that you will be mine?"

The colour which had mantled richly in Blanche's cheek the moment before, fled from it. She trembled, and her heart beat violently. Then raising herself up, she answered,

"Do not speak to me like that, Sidney, you distress me very much. I thought you loved me as a cousin—a sister—nothing more, and—" But here her voice failed her, and turning from him she burst into tears.

"Blanche, my darling," cried Sidney, covering her hand with kisses, "forgive me, if I have been too abrupt in what I have said. Do not turn away from me," he continued, as she withdrew her hand gently but decidedly from his grasp. "Let me have one word, just one word of hope?"

Blanche rose up. Commanding her voice with an effort, she said,

"No, Sidney, I do not, I never can love you in that way. If I have ever led you to suppose such a thing possible, I am truly sorry. Leave me now, I beg of you, and never never speak to me like that again."

There was a quiet dignity in her manner, and a firmness of purpose in her words, which made Sidney Graham turn sick at heart. This man felt the happiness of his life was vanishing before him, and he grew desperate.

"Blanche," he cried, seizing her by the wrist as she moved towards the window, "you must not, shall not, answer me so. If you do not give me some hope, I shall curse the day I was born, I shall curse the hour I first saw you. Blanche," and his voice became low and entreating, "you cannot be so cruel. You are good,—you wish to see others good and happy about you. I have often heard you say that without goodness and the love of God, there could be no true happiness. I tell you, Blanche, that if you will only listen to me, and let me try to win your love, you may do anything with me, you can make me what you please. For your sake I will think about religion, I will try to serve God in a way I have never done before. For your sake there is nothing I will not do. But, if you spurn me from you now, if you will not give me some hope, I swear that I will never believe in goodness or in

God again ! You have the salvation of my soul in your hands. Blanche, answer me !”

He knelt down. He crouched at her feet. He grasped her hand with the strength of a vice. He seemed beside himself with passion and despair.

And Blanche, who leaned with one hand on the back of a chair for support, endeavoured vainly to release the other from his hold. She was pale as death, and trembled from head to foot. Once or twice she tried to speak, but was unable to do so. His violence for the moment had terrified her. Presently recovering herself, she said,

“ It is wicked of you to say such things. It would be wicked of me were I to deceive you for one instant, into thinking I could ever love you as a husband. If you have one spark of manly feeling in you, you will be satisfied with that answer and leave me. I will pray for you. I can say no more.”

He sprang to his feet with a cry. He struck his forehead with his hand. He stepped back and looked at her in a way which made her shudder. It was a look of such bitter anger and hate. Then slowly he spoke, or rather hissed out these words from between his clenched teeth :—

“ It is well. You have decided, and to that God in Whom you profess to believe, you will answer for this day's work. One word more, Blanche Lennox, and you may believe me when I

say it. If ever you love another, may you never be his! and I swear—do you hear me?" and he took a step or two nearer to where she stood, "*I swear you never shall be.*"

He remained gazing at her for another minute, then turned on his heel and left the room.

Blanche neither spoke nor moved. She never took her eyes off him. She seemed fascinated by terror. When he was gone and she was alone, she still remained standing for some time in the same attitude. Then slowly sinking back on the sofa, her eyes closed, and she fainted away.

In the meanwhile, Ferdinand and Barbara were enjoying their ride and commenting on the beauty of the weather as they went along. Ferdinand wanted to look at Frodsham Church, and they stopped at Mr. Hayward's house in the village to inquire if he was at home and could take them to see it. Mr. Hayward was somewhere in the parish, the servant said, but she would send and find him if the lady and gentleman wished it. Ferdinand, however, assured her that if they could have the keys of the church it would not be necessary for her to do that, and having procured them, they rode on to the church-yard, followed by a lad who volunteered to hold their horses when they went in.

Ferdinand had not been to Frodsham since the works had been completed, and he was much pleased and interested by all he saw. Barbara

entered fully into his feeling, and re-echoed all his expressions of admiration and delight. She was in particularly high spirits, and in one of her most amiable moods. Riding always excited and animated her, and although neither she nor her companion spoke in other than subdued tones whilst in the church, it was easy to see from the quickness of her remarks and the sparkling of her eyes, how lightsome and joyous was the spirit within.

"I think we ought to be going," said Ferdinand at length, "you know what my father said about the rain, and it looks as if it was clouding over already."

Barbara agreed that it would be as well to be starting homewards, and accordingly, after giving the boy a trifle for holding their horses, and handing over the keys to his custody, they again mounted and took the road towards Wentmore.

After a few remarks about the satisfactory manner in which Frodsham Church had been restored, the two cousins proceeded for some way in silence. Ferdinand seemed lost in thought, and Barbara amused herself by caressing the animal on which she rode, and addressing it from time to time with words of endearment. Presently, Ferdinand looked round, and checking his horse's pace into a walk, he said, "Bibi, I want to speak to you."

Barbara reined in her horse and turned towards

him with a smile, whilst the colour mounted to her cheek.

"Well, speak away then."

But Ferdinand seemed to find some difficulty in "speaking away." He hesitated and stammered and repeated, "I want to know" and "I mean, I should like to ask," and a few other disjointed and unsatisfactory sentences of the same kind so often, that Barbara at length burst out laughing, and said,

"My dear Ferdinand, don't go on like that, but tell me what it is you want to say. I hate being kept in suspense."

"Well then, Bibi, I want to know what you think about long engagements. Do you think they are desirable or not?"

If anyone had seen the expression of triumph and delight which flashed over Barbara Lennox's countenance as she bent forward for a moment to pat her horse's neck as Ferdinand spoke, they would have guessed her secret and known what she thought was coming.

"That depends on circumstances, Mr. Ferdinand," was her answer, as she raised her head and gave a little nervous laugh.

"Of course, I know that. But when people are both very young, when a fellow is not quite of age, for instance, and knows that he can't marry immediately, do you think that he ought to ask a girl to engage herself to him or not?"

"Well now, that is a question which demands a little consideration," returned Barbara, after a moment's pause. "I think a gentleman should feel very sure of a young lady's preference, before he asks her to bind herself to him by an engagement, for any length of time."

"But, supposing he does feel quite sure, or at least *pretty* sure," continued Ferdinand, colouring and smiling, "what should you say then?"

"I do not think there can be any harm in his finding out, and making himself certain about it at any rate."

"Thank you, for saying that much," rejoined her cousin, warmly. "And now, Barbara, I must tell you something else." He drew nearer to her side as he spoke, and Barbara in vain endeavoured to appear at her ease and unconcerned. "I am in love—don't laugh at me—very much in love, and I think, I am almost sure, that I might venture—I think that if I was to propose, I should not be rejected."

Barbara did not feel in the least disposed to laugh. She was much more inclined to cry. She felt so sure of what was coming, and it made her so happy, that tears of joy sprang into her eyes, whether she would or not.

"Bibi, you and I have always been great friends?" continued Ferdinand.

"Yes," she replied softly, whilst she glanced

up into his face, and the beating of her heart almost made itself heard. "Great friends."

"I have never said a word to you before about this, but one cannot keep things for ever to oneself. I do not think Blanche or anyone has guessed my secret, and I would rather for the present that it remained one. Do you understand, dear?"

"Yes," answered Barbara, and her heart beat even faster than before.

"You know me so well, Bibi, and you may think I am presumptuous," continued Ferdinand. "I know I am not worthy of——"

"Oh! Ferdinand, do not say that!" exclaimed Barbara, eagerly. "As if you were not better than anyone in the world!" And then she cast down her eyes and blushed deeply.

"Dear Bibi, it is very good of you to say so, but I know that I am not worthy of anyone so good, and so perfect in every way as she."

Barbara did not attempt any further remonstrance. She wondered at his making use of the third person, but that did not signify.

"My mother and Blanche would be so pleased, they have known and liked her for so long," continued Ferdinand, "and as to her being thought plain, she has always been beautiful in my eyes, and I don't care what she is in other peoples'."

Barbara felt taken aback. She had, without being particularly vain, always considered herself,

and been (at least so she thought) considered by others, as good-looking rather than otherwise. Besides, why would he go on speaking to her of herself as "she?" It was awkward to say the least of it.

"After the encouragement you have given me, I shall ride over to-morrow and decide my fate at once," Ferdinand went on. "As soon as I have her answer I shall speak to my father and mother. I only hope no difficulty will be raised by hers."

"By hers?—ride over to-morrow?" stammered Barbara, pulling up her horse short in her astonishment. "About whom—of what are you talking?"

"About Cissy Lethbridge, of course," answered Ferdinand, looking as much surprised as herself. "Of whom did you suppose I could be speaking?"

"About *Cissy Lethbridge!*!" cried Barbara, and there was a world of anguish and of wonder in her tone. She could say no more; she felt sick and giddy, and as if she should fall from her horse.

"My dear Bibi! What is the matter?" exclaimed Ferdinand in alarm, as he saw her clutch the pommel of her saddle for support.

"Nothing," she murmured. Then recovering herself with an immense effort, she struck her horse violently with her whip; it reared, bounded forward, and in a moment was out of sight.

Ferdinand Lennox was amazed. He had no suspicion of the truth, poor love-blind fellow, with

no eyes and no thoughts, save of a brotherly kind, for other than the gentle girl whom he had known from childhood, and for whom his love had grown with his years, though all unknown and unsuspected by those around him, how was it likely he should have? He had scarcely looked at or noticed his cousin whilst speaking to her, she had always been to him so exactly like a sister, and in choosing her for a confidante, he had done so believing that she felt towards him as a sister, and nothing more.

His first idea on seeing her start off at such a tremendous rate was, that her horse had taken fright and was running away, and he hesitated about following her, lest he should alarm it the more. But just as he was making up his mind to do so at all hazards, and had struck the spurs into his own horse for that purpose, he saw her to his relief and also somewhat to his surprise, coming back towards him at a sober trot.

"Sultana was startled," she said, as he rode up to her, and eagerly inquired the meaning of her sudden disappearance. "I suppose you thought she had run away with me, but I soon got her in hand again. As it is getting late, I think we had better hurry on."

She spoke in her usual tone, and with a manner which, if a little constrained, was still perfectly composed.

Ferdinand laughed, and assured her that it was

a comfort to him to see her safe and sound. He did not know Sultana was given to such tricks, but agreed with her that they had better hasten home, as the clouds looked more threatening every moment, and it was getting late as well.

They neither of them spoke much again until arrived at the Rectory gate. Then turning to Ferdinand, Barbara proposed that they should dismount at the stables, without going up to the house.

"I have a little headache," she said, "and must try and walk it off before dinner. I shall just run round the shrubbery, but do you go in and say we have come back, or they will wonder what has become of us."

Ferdinand assented, and having dismounted himself, hastened to offer her his assistance, but ere he could reach her side she had sprung to the ground.

Gathering up her habit, she nodded to him and ran off towards the shrubbery, which skirted the Rectory grounds, and was of considerable extent.

No sooner was she alone, than her self-command gave way. She turned ashy pale, and shivered from head to foot. Turning round to see if she was quite alone and hidden from sight, she satisfied herself that a turn in the path had taken her beyond the reach of observation. Then, clenching her fist and stamping on the ground, the unhappy

girl cried in a low tone of unutterable anguish, "Oh, fool, fool, fool that I was, to think that he loved me! Oh, that I could die! oh, that I might die!"

At that instant, the storm which had long been threatening, broke overhead, and great heavy drops fell upon her as she stood. Cold as she had been a moment before, she felt now as if seized with a burning heat, and baring her forehead to the heavens, she held up her face as though courting the rain as it descended. But presently, seeing that she should be drenched through if she remained where she was, and not feeling inclined to return towards the house, she ran forward in the direction of a summer-house which stood at some little distance, and which she knew would afford her shelter. It was nearly dark, and she did not perceive on entering it that her place of refuge was already occupied. A movement at the further end caused her to bend forward with a feeling of alarm. The figure of a man lay stretched at full length on a bench in one corner. He raised himself up and came forward.

"Barbara! Is that you?" exclaimed a harsh, discordant voice, which she had some difficulty in recognizing as that of her cousin Sidney.

"Yes," she answered. "How you startled me! I am seeking shelter from the storm. We have only just come back from our ride and I wanted a

little run before dinner. But I did not expect to find anyone here!"

"Is it raining?" asked Sidney. As he spoke, he advanced towards the entrance of the summer house, and Barbara started to see by the dim light which fell upon his features, how pale and haggard they were.

CHAPTER XV.

If it had not been raining so heavily, Barbara would have rushed out of the summer-house again, for she was in no mood for conversation, and was vexed at having encountered Sidney in this way. As it was, she was obliged to remain under cover, and to content herself with standing with her back to him, looking out into the rapidly darkening shrubbery, and wondering what ill-luck could have brought him there just then. Sidney did not seem more disposed to speak than she was, and having satisfied himself as to the fact of its being an unmistakable ‘pour down,’ he retreated without further remark to his seat again.

Barbara was the first to speak. In a tone of impatient annoyance, she exclaimed, “It will never leave off! It is of no use staying here, and the dressing bell will have rung before we can get back.”

Her companion made no response. She could not see him where he sat, and his silence irritated her.

"Did you know there was a dinner party this evening?" she asked, rather sharply, turning her head for one moment.

"Yes. I suppose we must go in."

He got up, and again approached the entrance.

"It is a disgusting nuisance. I wish the stupid people were not coming," muttered Barbara.

"Indeed! I thought you liked the people about here."

"I hate them. A pack of idiots. But what else could you expect in such a place?" Barbara said with bitter emphasis.

"I fancied that everything at Wentmore must approve itself to you," said Sidney. "I am astonished to hear you speak of it like that."

"Wentmore!" cried Barbara, vehemently. "I think the place and the people in it are alike. Detestable."

"And yet, it was only yesterday that I heard you saying how sorry you were that you were all going away, and how much you should have liked to remain here the whole summer!"

"There is such a thing as changing one's mind, I suppose," returned Barbara. "I am very glad I am going away, and only wish I was never coming back again at all."

Now if Sidney could have had his own way at that moment, he would have committed the whole of the Wentmore family to the uttermost depths

of the Red Sea. He simply abominated them, but he was surprised at discovering a like feeling in so unexpected a quarter.

"But it is absurd our remaining here," continued Barbara, "I shall make a run for it, and you can do as you like."

"Stay a moment, Barbara. It is raining too heavily to last, and will leave off in a little while. If you so dislike the idea of returning to Wentmore again, why should you do so?"

Barbara turned round and stared at the speaker through the darkness. She could see his form where he stood, but it was impossible to discern his features.

"Where else could I go? This is my home. I have no other, though God knows I would rather stay anywhere, than be obliged to come back to it."

"There is always one way open to you of leaving it for ever if you choose," said Sidney, taking a step nearer to her, and speaking in a low earnest tone.

"What do you mean?" asked Barbara. "I don't understand you."

She was startled by his manner, it perplexed her.

"Why don't you marry? You need not come back then."

"Why don't I marry?" laughed Barbara, (and it was not a pleasant laugh to hear.) "I would

marry anyone to get away from this place. I should not care who."

" You really mean that, Barbara ?"

" I really mean it."

Her cousin came up to her and laid his hand on her shoulder. They could neither of them see the other's face. Slowly and emphatically he said these words :

" Then—Barbara—marry me."

Barbara did not start or exclaim, or show any sign of surprise whatever. She stood perfectly still with his hand on her shoulder, looking out into the darkness, and in a voice so hard, so strange, so unlike her own, that he could not help being struck by it, she answered,

" Sidney Graham—I will."

He did not love her. She did not love him. When first she had broken in upon his solitude, he had felt considerably annoyed at being disturbed ; but he soon discovered that she was in no ordinary frame of mind, and as he listened to her expressions of dislike towards Wentmore, and all connected with it, a kind of sympathy drew him towards her. " I hate them, too," he thought, " and I should like to show that I am not pining for *her*, at any rate ! I will marry some one at once, and if Barbara will have me, I will marry her." Revenge upon Blanche,—to wound her, if possible, by this speedy transfer of his affections to another, was his object, and Barbara, at that

moment, would have accepted anyone who asked her, in order to prove to Ferdinand, that she had never thought of *him*.

She held out her hand to Sidney, and he took it. He did not offer to kiss her, and she would have turned away from him, if he had. Nothing more was said, and as the rain had in some measure subsided, they quitted their place of shelter, and walked back, side by side, to the house. And the angels who watched them, must have shuddered, as they gazed on this disappointed man, and this disappointed woman, who had thus pledged themselves to each other, and were entering upon a future, fraught with certain misery for both !

“Do not say a word of this to-night!” Sidney whispered, as they emerged from the shrubbery, upon the drive. She bowed her head in acquiescence, without speaking. In another moment, they were standing within the entrance-hall. Barbara at once, ran up to her room, locked the door, and threw herself on her knees by the bed-side, covering her face with her hands. If ever any one felt utterly wretched, Barbara Lennox did at that moment.

When Lady Frances had returned from her drive that afternoon, she encountered Mrs. Statham on the stairs, as she was going up to her room, having looked in vain for Blanche below : and was informed, that “Miss Lennox was not feeling well,

and she, (Mrs. Statham,) had sent for Mr. Findlay, as she had been rather frightened about her. She was upstairs, in her Ladyship's dressing-room."

Lady Frances hurried on and found Blanche lying on a sofa, looking very pale, and complaining of severe pain in her head. "Statham thought she had better send for Mr. Findlay, mamma," said Blanche, forcing a smile as she saw her mother's anxious look, "and I was not able to prevent her. But I am sure I shall be quite well, after a night's rest," and she held up a warning finger to the good housekeeper as she spoke, which Lady Frances did not observe.

Mrs. Statham had found her young mistress in a half unconscious state, in the little morning room down stairs, an hour or so before. She had seen Mr. Graham go out, and knowing that Blanche would be alone, had carried her a cup of tea from her own room. Her alarm had been great, on perceiving Blanche's condition, but with the aid of restoratives, and of Blanche's maid, whose assistance she hastily summoned, she soon had the satisfaction of seeing her young lady look more like herself again. In reply to all Mrs. Statham's ejaculations and enquiries, Blanche only said that she had felt suddenly faint, and did not know how long she had been in that state, until just before the housekeeper's entrance, when she had opened her eyes, and partly regained her consciousness. Mrs. Statham and the maid sup-

ported her upstairs, and she could not prevent the former from despatching a messenger for the doctor. "But promise not to say a word to mamma, about my having fainted," she said, as they placed her on the sofa, in Lady Frances's dressing-room, "it will only frighten her, and do no good."

Mrs. Statham gave the required promise, but inwardly resolved to acquaint her mistress with the truth as soon as possible.

When Ferdinand entered the house, some half-hour afterwards, and ran upstairs in search of his mother and sister, he was surprised at seeing the latter looking so pale and ill. Mr. Findlay arrived almost at the same time, and was immediately taken upstairs by Mrs. Statham.

"I saw you and your cousin riding through the village," he said to Ferdinand, "and thought you were fortunate in escaping the rain. It is coming down now, and no mistake!"

"Bibi will be caught in it!" exclaimed Ferdinand. "She insisted on going round the shrubbery, before coming in. I thought it was very venturesome of her, and only hope she turned back in time."

"And what is the matter with this young lady?" enquired Mr. Findlay, taking Blanche by the hand, who looked smilingly up into his face.

A few words sufficed to explain that she had not been feeling well all day, and Mrs. Statham had

thought it best to send for him, in the absence of her master and mistress. He felt her pulse, and asked some questions, and after a short consultation with Lady Frances, it was determined that Blanche was not to appear at dinner that evening, "Though she may go down stairs, for half an hour or so afterwards, if she likes," concluded the doctor.

He had been privately informed by Mrs. Statham on entering the house, of the state in which she had found her young lady an hour before, and he saw from Blanche's manner that she was still very nervous and agitated. Recommending perfect quiet for the next hour or so, and saying he should call and see her again the next day, Mr. Findlay then departed.

Blanche did not come down at all that night, and Barbara had to do duty for both herself and her absent cousin, and no one, seeing her bright and animated smile as she conversed with the assembled guests, could have guessed what an aching heart she carried beneath her bosom.

She and Ferdinand went upstairs together after the gentlemen had come in from the dining-room, to visit Blanche in her own room, but his sister soon sent Ferdinand down again to "attend to the young ladies" as she said. The two girls were then left alone, and Barbara placed herself on a low stool at Blanche's feet, and taking one of her hands in hers, she stroked it and kissed it,

and asked her "What she meant by being so naughty?"

Blanche threw herself back in her chair, and with half-closed eyes and a tremulous voice, told what had passed between her and Sidney that afternoon.

Barbara listened in silence. Her head was leaning against the side of the chair, so that Blanche could not see her face, and she remained perfectly motionless from the time Sidney's name was first mentioned, until her cousin ceased speaking.

"How cold your hand is, Bibi dear," said Blanche, as she ended her recital. "I heard Ferdinand say something about your having been out in the rain. I am afraid you must have got a chill."

"I think I have," replied Barbara, averting her head, as she slowly rose and stood by her cousin's side. "Now I shall leave you, dear, and the sooner you are in bed the better. I am not the least surprised at what you have told me, and, of course, I shall say nothing about it." Then pressing a kiss upon Blanche's forehead, she hurried from the room.

Blanche thought her manner was abrupt, and rather wondered at her not having made some further remark on the subject of her scene with Sidney. When Mrs. Statham came in, a few

minutes after, she told her that she was sure Miss Barbara had caught cold.

"I don't think there is much the matter with her," remarked the old lady. "She is singing with Mr. Ferdinand in the drawing-room, I could hear them as I came upstairs. She is not hoarse at all events."

Sidney Graham was unusually silent all that evening. "Out of spirits," Mrs. Fraser Smith remarked in an aside to Barbara. "It is quite touching to see how devoted he is to dear Blanche, he cannot even smile when she is not here!"

When the guests had departed and they were separating for the night, Sidney told his uncle it was necessary that he should be in Scotland shortly, and that he should be obliged to leave them early the following morning, as he wished to be in town for a few days before going North. Mr. Lennox remonstrated, and thought there could be no need for so sudden a departure, but Sidney shook his head and said he certainly must go, although he was very sorry to leave them all so soon. Lady Frances expressed a hope that they might meet in town again before long, and assured him that Blanche would be very sorry to hear he was going, after so short a stay too. Ferdinand laughed at the idea of Sid's becoming such a man of business all of a sudden, and prophesied that it would not be long before he was South again.

"I shall suspect there is some attraction in

that quarter that we don't know of," he called after Sidney, as the latter went to his own room, "if you don't come back soon. I don't believe a word about the lawyers!"

Sidney breakfasted alone the next morning, and set off before any of the family had made their appearance.

"Give that note to Miss Barbara, please," he said to Mrs. Statham, who was lying in wait for him with a small packet of sandwiches in one hand, and of biscuits in the other, without which she did not consider that anyone should start from the Rectory, on however short a journey. "It contains a direction which I promised her, and give her my love."

"I think he might have asked after Miss Blanche," the housekeeper said to herself, as the carriage drove off. "I believe it was half his fault that she was ill yesterday, going bothering into that room when she was alone and wanted to be quiet." She little thought, good soul, how much it was his fault!

When Barbara opened the note which was brought to her by her maid, an hour after Sidney's departure, she read the following lines:

"I shall be at Leamington in a fortnight's time, when I shall see you again. In the meanwhile we can keep our own counsel.

"Your's ever,
"S."

She crushed it in her hand, and kept it there until the servant had left the room again. Then striking a match, she lit a taper, and held the note in the flame till it was consumed, and fell in ashes into the grate. She looked at the blackened fragments for a moment, and then turned away with a scornful little laugh. Her long dark hair was hanging in rich masses over her shoulders. She took up a brush and began brushing it vigorously, then throwing it back with both hands, she went up to a long cheval glass which stood on one side of the room, and surveyed herself from head to foot with an expression of unutterable disdain.

"Mrs.—Sidney—Graham." She repeated slowly, as she gazed at herself in the glass.
"Mrs. Sidney—Graham!"

When she appeared at the breakfast table, and the others were remarking upon Sidney's abrupt departure, she merely observed, "He was quite right to go, if he had business to attend to, and we can get on very well without him during the short time we shall still be here."

Blanche had been asleep when Barbara looked in upon her before going to bed the night before, and when she had dismissed her maid and locked her door, she flung herself into a chair and remained for long in an attitude of bitter meditation. "I am mad. I must be!" she said to herself several times. "I am either mad or very wicked. He does not love me. If he cares for anyone it

is for Blanche, and only this very day,—this very day he asked her to marry him ! The knowledge of that alone would quite justify me in throwing him off, if I chose to do so. I certainly do not love *him!*" And here the wretched girl broke down altogether. She thought of him she did love, and of the happiness which was to be another's,—which she could never hope for now,—and with agonized sobs she threw herself on the bed, and at length wept herself to sleep. In the morning, she awoke to a remembrance of what had passed the day before. She thought of her conversation with Ferdinand, and of her engagement to Sidney, and she resolved to persevere in the last to the end. She could not stay there. She could not bear to see him devoted to another. She would go away and never come back, and there was only one way in which she could do that !

The week following saw Wentmore Rectory entirely deserted. Mr. Lennox, Lady Frances and Blanche had left for London. Ferdinand and Barbara accompanied them on their journey, and took leave of them as they drove off from the station to Grosvenor Square. Ferdinand then proceeded to Paddington with his cousin and her maid, and saw them safely off on their way to Warwickshire, after which he betook himself to Euston Square, and started for the Lakes. Barbara looked at him as he stood on the platform of the Great Western Station, when her train moved

off, until the tears blinded her, and she could see no more. Then, as there was no one else in the carriage but her maid, she leaned back in her corner and cried silently to herself. The maid thought how much she felt parting from her relations, and made up a little romance in her own mind about her young lady and Mr. Ferdinand, which was to end in their marrying some day, and being happy for ever after. Alas ! for poor Barbara, that the maid's romance was so little likely to come true.

Before leaving Wentmore, Ferdinand had asked and obtained Colonel Lethbridge's consent to "speak to Cissy," but it was on the understanding that no positive engagement was to take place between them for a time. "You are both so young, and my girl has seen so little of the world at present, that I must insist upon her not making any formal promise for a while, at least. But there is no one, my dear fellow," he added, shaking Ferdinand warmly by the hand, "that I would rather give her to than yourself. If all goes well, we shall see what can be done about it bye and bye."

This was as much as Ferdinand had dared to hope for, and meanwhile, he and Cissy were very happy, Mr. Lennox and Lady Frances were quite satisfied, and Blanche looked brighter when she was told of what had taken place between her

brother and her friend, than she had done for a long time past.

The change from the quiet and regular routine of life at Wentmore, to the whirl and gaiety of a London Season, was as great as it was sudden. The Lennoxes had not been many days in town before invitations for Lady Frances and Blanche began to pour in thickly. The Rector did not go to balls, but even he could not escape under three dinner parties a week at the least, and he declared that he should "soon knock up at that rate." As for his wife and daughter they could do as they pleased, so long as he was not asked to accompany them from one scene of dissipation to another. For Blanche's sake, Lady Frances exerted herself to the utmost, and for a while her efforts seemed to meet with success. The novelty and excitement of the scenes in which she now mixed for the first time, had a charm for Blanche which led her to enter into them with pleasure and avidity. She had been presented at Court by her mother the year before, but her peep of London Life then had been a very circumscribed one, and she had returned to Wentmore after a week's stay in town, with a firm conviction that the pleasures and occupations of her country home, were much more suited to her taste than the bustle and turmoil of the gay world. But now, when so many people, with whose names she was familiar, but with whom she had never been brought in contact be-

fore, surrounded her with smiles and attention, (for as Lord Norwood's niece she was sure of being well received in a certain set, and it was already rumoured that her father was a rich man, and she an only daughter, which many interpreted to mean "only child,") she persuaded herself that she had been mistaken in the estimate she had formed of these people hitherto, and that 'the fashionable world,' as it is called, was a very pleasant goodnatured world after all.

But after a time, Lady Frances began to notice that Blanche did not seem to care for her balls and parties so much as she had done at first. Instead of returning eagerly from their drive in the park, to dress for the opera, and after that, going with alacrity from one ball to another, which had been the programme of successive evenings on their first arrival, Blanche seemed to think that one engagement for an evening was quite sufficient, and if she did accompany her mother and cousin to any of the large *réunions* which were going on, after they had been dining out or had gone to the opera, she was contented to walk through the rooms and then "unless Margaret wished to stay," go home as soon as possible. Lady Margaret seldom cared to remain late anywhere, as she did not dance much herself, and went to balls and "crushes" night after night, more to please her father than herself. Lord Norwood was glad that his daughter should appear under his

sister's *chaperonage*, it was pleasanter than always to be asking one or other of their friends to let her go with them, or else to have to accompany her himself, which was a thing he seldom or never did if he could help it. He liked his daughter to go out, and keep up her position in society, but beyond entertaining at home, and looking in for half an hour at such houses as he felt he must show himself at, he had as little to do with the "night work" of the season, as he expressed it, as possible. Lady Dereham had, the year before, been too happy to go with her sister-in-law anywhere, but this summer she was not in town, an heir to the noble House of Stewart being shortly expected. When she was first married, Lord Norwood had warned her that one of her duties would be "to take Margaret about in the season, regularly every year, as she seemed determined to remain on his hands, and he began to despair of ever getting rid of her." "As if you ever wished to do so, you naughty ungrateful papa," his daughter would say, when she heard him. "And if I did marry it would make no difference, as I should have to live with you and look after you then!" The Earl always laughed and shook his head at this, and declared that "once his own master again, he should take care to remain so," and then he would kiss his daughter fondly on her brow, and wonder "what he should do without her."

Lady Dereham, who was a merry, light-hearted young creature, engaged readily to "look after Margaret," she being at least ten years the younger of the two, but this year she was not able, as we have said, to do so, and Lady Frances' advent was therefore doubly welcome in Grosvenor Square.

"I think that child looks pale and fagged, and as if she had been doing too much," remarked Lady Frances to her niece, one night, after they had returned from a dance at —— House, and Blanche had hurried off to bed immediately upon reaching home, declining the tea which Lord Norwood had ready for them in the drawing-room.

"Yes, dear aunt, I agree with you," said Lady Margaret, "I think she does too much. She has often seemed tired of late. I can't think how she can get up every morning, as I know she does, to go to church, when she is so seldom in bed till late. But she is such a good little darling, she will never allow anything to interfere with that. I only know I could no more do it than fly!"

Lady Frances's eyes filled with tears. Her child's goodness was something too sacred in her eyes to touch upon lightly. None knew so well as she did, what Blanche was. Often and often she would say to herself as she looked at her, "She is too good to live!" and the feeling brought a pain with it, which mingled largely with its sweetness.

She thought a moment, and then said,

"I did not know there was any church very near here, where there was daily morning service? Surely she does not go at that hour so far as Margaret Street, if she does, it is enough to kill her,—before breakfast too! I must speak to her about it."

"I don't know," answered Lady Margaret, "I really never asked her where she went, I only know she does go somewhere. But now, my dearest, you must go to bed, for I am sure you are very tired too."

Blanche went every morning to the early Mass at Farm Street, which was only a few minutes walk from her uncle's house, but she had never told anyone she did so, and neither her mother nor cousin for a moment suspected that such was the case.

Her chief delight on the occasion of former visits to town, when for the sake of masters or some other reason, her parents had brought her up to London for a short time, had been the daily services at All Saints or S. Barnabas, whichever church they happened to be nearest to. But now, she felt happier when kneeling alone before the altar in a Roman Catholic Church, than she did when joining in the most ornate service the Anglican churches could offer her. And how was this?

The books which Arthur Woods had entrusted to her keeping for her brother Gerald, and which she had perused with earnest attention, had opened

her eyes to many truths concerning the Faith they advocated, which had been previously unknown to her. The fact that her own brother, whom she loved so dearly, and had always thought of so highly, had joined the much abused (and hitherto in her mind, more or less corrupt and fallen) Church of Rome, when he too had so well known what were the privileges and advantages the Church of England had to offer to her people, would in itself have made the study of the real doctrines and precepts of that communion, a matter of deep interest to her. And the more she read, the more she pondered, the more she weighed one assertion with another and compared the claims of the two Churches upon her allegiance, the more perplexed and uneasy she became in her mind; and the less she felt inclined to take for granted all that she had hitherto believed, respecting the Roman Catholic Church. At one time her doubts had risen to such a height, that she almost resolved to speak to her father on the subject, and hear what he had to say in reply to what appeared to her such unanswerable arguments. But she dreaded awaking his displeasure, even indirectly, against Gerald, whom she felt sure would have the credit, whether it was so or not, of having put such fancies into her head, and of causing him pain as well, and so she kept her uneasiness and her misgivings to herself, and said not a word about either to a living soul.

But the inward struggle told upon her, and her health and spirits gave way as we have seen. What, if she should be convinced of the necessity of leaving the English Church? What, if it became a question of taking up her cross and doing her Master's Will at all costs,—or of allowing her natural love for her parents to prevail, and remaining outside what she would in her inmost soul have to acknowledge, was the Only True Church,—the One Ark of Salvation? Should she have the courage and strength to follow the dictates of conscience or not? And then came to her mind those words of awful meaning:

He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.

Upon first coming up to London, the distraction afforded by the scenes of gaiety and dissipation upon which she had entered, had been welcome to her. She had tried to forget,—to fill her mind with other thoughts, and for a time she had partly succeeded. But then came a reaction, and she reproached herself with cowardice in shrinking from a question which every day became for her, one of graver and deeper import.

Lady Margaret Stewart, like many other London ladies, had one afternoon in the week on which she was known to be "at home" if her friends called and wished to see her. Thursday was her day, and every Thursday her drawing-room was filled by a number of visitors who looked

in to shake hands, talk about where they had been, where they were going, have a cup of tea and depart again.

On one of these occasions, Mrs. Vernon, who always made a point of visiting a relation of hers in Eaton Square, during the season, and who knew Lady Margaret slightly, happened to be sitting near Blanche who was helping her cousin to distribute the tea and bread and butter which were placed on a table at one end of the room. Having no one in particular to talk to at the moment, and not caring to sit silent long, she called out to Blanche,

"By the way, Miss Lennox, I hope you will be ready when I call for you on Sunday to take you to the Oratory? We must be in good time if we hope to get decent places. There is to be a famous preacher, and the music attracts so many that it is of no use going, if one is not there some time before the service begins."

"Are you going to the Oratory on Sunday, Blanche?" asked Lady Margaret in a low tone. "I think papa would be rather shocked if he knew that, and I don't know what Uncle Lennox would say!"

Blanche replied that she had thought of going, as Mrs. Vernon had been kind enough to say she would take her, and turning to Mrs. Vernon she told her she would certainly be in time.

"What a number of people have become Roman

Catholics lately," observed an old lady who was seated near Lady Frances, and who had heard something indistinctly about the 'Oratory.' "It is really quite sad. Poor Mrs. Herbert,—you remember her? Her only child was received last week by the Oratorians. They say she is broken-hearted."

Lady Frances sighed as she answered,

"Poor thing! If anyone can sympathize with her, *I* can!"

And Blanche, who was passing by at the moment, laid her hand on her heart as if with a sudden pang.

There was a large dinner and evening party that night at Norwood House, and Blanche, who seemed to have recovered her high spirits, laughed and talked and helped to entertain the guests so effectually, that Lady Margaret whispered to her aunt, "What should we do without her!" Lord Norwood, who doted upon her and called her his "little fairy," said to his sister, "What a bright little creature it is! I think she is more fascinating than ever, tonight. How desperately in love I should be with her, if I was a young fellow! You ought to be very proud of her, Fanny."

Lady Frances was very proud of her. She watched her with eyes of fond admiration as she passed from one group to another, in the lofty and brilliantly-lighted suite of rooms. When all were gone, and Blanche came up to her to kiss her and

say good night, she took one of her child's hands in her's, and exclaimed, "My darling ! Your hand is burning ! You have been doing too much. Go to bed directly. Do not think of coming to my room, but I shall come and look at you presently."

Blanche confessed that her head was aching, and that she was tired, and should be only too glad to do as her mother desired.

"That child was quite feverish," thought Lady Frances, as she went along the passage towards Blanche's room, before retiring to rest herself. She opened the door softly, and went in, shading the light which she carried in one hand with the other. Blanche was in bed and fast asleep. Her mother approached gently, and gazed at her fondly and wistfully.

Her long eyelashes were wet as if with recent tears, and the cheek which had burned with so bright a colour all the evening, now rivalled the snowy pillows on which her head reposed, in whiteness. There was a look of suffering too, on the face, which went to the mother's heart. Lady Frances placed the light on a table, and stood silently watching her darling for many minutes, whilst from time to time a deep drawn sigh escaped her. She was conscious that some secret grief preyed upon Blanche's mind, which she was unable to penetrate, and as she stood, she lifted her heart in prayer to God for her child and herself.

On a table near the bed stood a small, exquisitely carved, ivory crucifix. Lady Frances glanced at it for a moment, but was not struck by the circumstance, as she had long been accustomed to the sight of such devotional adjuncts, in the rooms of her children. Both Gerald and Ferdinand, and Blanche also, had used them for years.

A Prayer-book lay open before it, and this Lady Frances took up to examine. It was evidently what Blanche had been using that night. Her eyes fell upon a Litany, the commencement of which seemed familiar to her, but as she read on, she started, and turned to look at the title of the book. It was the "Golden Manual," a Roman Catholic book of devotions, and the Litany was that of the Blessed Virgin.

For a moment Lady Frances was puzzled ; she did not understand what it meant. Then a dread, a suspicion of the truth flashed across her.

"O, my God !" she ejaculated, "spare me this sorrow !"

"Is that you, mamma ?" said Blanche's voice. Her mother's exclamation and movements had awakened her.

"Yes, my darling. I am afraid I have disturbed you ? Go to sleep again."

She bent over her and kissed her. Blanche smiled, and closed her eyes again, murmuring, "Good night, dearest mamma."

Lady Frances remained gazing at her for a few

moments, and then stole quietly from the room, resolving that on the morrow she would speak to her child seriously, on the subject of her Popish tendencies.

But the next day there was a Morning Concert to which they all went, and Lady Frances was too tired after it, to go out with her niece and daughter for their usual afternoon drive. She had a dinner party and a ball before her, and she was obliged to rest herself in preparation for these, so that she could find no time for any quiet conversation with Blanche. The next day and the day after, were also entirely taken up by various engagements, and although quite determined to speak to her child, and warn her of the danger of accustoming herself to the use of Roman Catholic devotions, as tending to produce an erroneous train of thought in the mind, Lady Frances put off doing so for the present, and Blanche remained in ignorance of her mother's momentary uneasiness on her account.

One afternoon towards the end of July, Blanche having remained at home to write to her brothers and Barbara, which she had no time to do earlier in the day, Lady Frances and her niece were alone in the carriage, as it drove slowly round the Park. The conversation turned upon religious subjects, and the progress which the Roman Catholic Church was making in England.

"Blanche tells me," said Lady Margaret, "that

Gerald seems very happy in Brussels, but I wonder at his being contented to remain so long away from you all."

"No one knows," answered Lady Frances, "what his loss is to me, but I believe he is really and truly happy where he is, and that is a great comfort. There is no doubt, that Romanists have a great many external aids in their religion, which one is inclined to envy them. Their ever open churches and beautiful services, for instance. Gerald, of course, has everything of that sort about him, which he can possibly desire. I miss him in a thousand ways, more than I can say, and so does Blanche, poor darling, I know, although she says little about it. Do you know, Margaret, that I have sometimes feared of late that she is inclined that way herself."

And then Lady Frances related the incident of her visit to Blanche's room when she was asleep, and her discovery of the Roman Catholic prayer-book on her table. Lady Margaret shook her head, and said, Blanche was a naughty little thing, and ought to know better than to play with edged tools, but as to Roman Catholic books, she assured her aunt that there was a great deal that was very beautiful in some of them, and that she often used them herself. "And you know," she added, "your own favourite Thomas à Kempis was a Roman Catholic monk,

and I have often heard you and Uncle Lennox too, say what a beautiful book that of his, is."

Lady Frances confessed that such was the case, and began to think she had distressed herself unnecessarily on the subject.

On their return home, Lady Margaret went upstairs to her own room, and her aunt entered the drawing-room where Blanche, having finished her letters, was sitting with a book. Lady Frances sank into a chair, and said, she was glad that they were going to remain quietly at home that evening, as she felt tired, "And I am glad for your sake, my darling," she said, as Blanche came and knelt down by her side, "for I am sure you need a rest as well."

"I am not sorry, dearest," answered Blanche, taking her mother's hand and caressing it fondly. "And now tell me where you have been, and whom you have seen."

Lady Frances enumerated various houses at which they had left cards, and mentioned the names of the friends and acquaintances they had seen near or at a distance.

"Mrs. Vernon, dressed '*à l'outrance*,' as usual, was in a very pretty carriage with a lady, her cousin I suppose. They had taken up their position at the end of the Row, and I noticed Sir Edward Bateson and a number of people about her," she concluded. "In short, we saw all the fashion and beauty of London, and very charming

some of the beauties are, but I never see anyone I think half so lovely as you, my darling, go where I will!" And Lady Frances laid her hand lovingly on Blanche's head as she spoke.

"That is because you are infatuated, dearest," said Blanche, laughing, and covering her mother's hand with kisses.

"And I am sure others must think the same when they see you," added Lady Frances, smiling.

"Others are not so silly, darling," answered Blanche.

Then, looking into her mother's face, whilst the tears gathered in her eyes, she said,

"How much you love me, dearest mamma!"

"God only knows how much, my darling!"

"And would you love me always,—through everything—and whatever might happen?" continued Blanche, laying her head on her mother's shoulder.

"Yes. Always—always." Lady Frances replied, a strange misgiving taking possession of her as she did so.

Blanche's voice almost sank into a whisper as she said,

"Even—even if I were to become a Catholic?"

And then the mother knew her child's secret.

END OF VOL. I.





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